

LEFTY O'the TRAINING CAMP



BURT L. STANDISH

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A MOMENT LATER THE MANAGER WAS GRIPPING THE
SOUTHPAW'S HAND AND ASKING THE
INEVITABLE QUESTIONS.

(Page 68 Frontispiece

LEFTY O' THE TRAINING CAMP

BY

BURT L. STANDISH

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League," "Lefty o' the Blue Stockings,"
"Brick King, Backstop," etc.

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LEFTY O' THE TRAINING CAMP

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LEFTY O' THE TRAINING CAMP

CHAPTER I

THE GROUCH

“CROOKED? You never said a truer word in your life, Tethridge. Professional baseball’s so rotten it’s a wonder the board of health don’t get after it.”

The lean, slope-shouldered man sitting next to the window of the smoking car bent a puzzled glance on his more robust companion.

“Board o’ ’ealth?” he echoed, his sandy eyebrows arching in an odd note of interrogation. “I don’t tyke you, old chap. What ’ave the board o’ ’ealth to do with biseball?”

The young man at his elbow frowned, and pushed back a long lock of dark hair straggling down from under the straight brim of an exaggeratedly flat derby.

“Nothing,” he answered, in a resigned tone. “That was only my little joke, old man. In such

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a bad state the board of health is needed. Get me?"

For a second or two the Englishman preserved that expression of stolid inquiry. Then, suddenly as cracks radiate over a sheet of heavy glass fractured by a stone, that long, solemn face broke into curving lines, and he laughed in a booming bass note quite out of keeping with the lean, narrow-chested figure. "Jolly good, old chap! My word! I 'ad no ideah you was such a bloomin' joker, Nelson."

He nudged his companion in the ribs. The latter, striving unsuccessfully to dismiss the expression of utter boredom from his tanned, rather rough-hewn face, pulled a package of cheap cigarettes from his pocket and offered them to the man by the window. Tethridge declined the cigarettes in favor of a blackened, disreputable-looking brier.

"The whole proposition's as crooked as the fighting game," declared the man called Nelson; "an' that's saying a whole lot, believe me! The crowd that runs it is out for the coin, an', take my word, they squeeze the public and rob their white slave players to get it."

He paused a second to send a swift sidelong glance at G. Munby Tethridge, who nodded instant agreement. In the seat just ahead a clean-cut, alert-looking man, with keen brown eyes and a

firm chin, moved his broad shoulders impatiently, and frowned at the magazine lying open on one knee.

"Gas bag!" he muttered under his breath.

"Look at the post season last year," pursued the maligner of organized baseball viciously. "Two-thirds or more o' the tickets handed over to speculators, an' anybody wantin' to see a game had to pay double or triple. Do you think them speculators didn't have to whack up with the management? Sure they did! It was a put-up job."

"What I always contended," agreed the Englishman, pulling hard on the odorous pipe. "A bally crooked gyne through an' through. Tyke a look at the w'y it's pl'yed. Anything goes, by Jove, so long as a man ain't caught. He'll swear himself black in the fice he wasn't put out when he was, or that he touched every bise when maybe he missed one; and the lies all go if the umpire didn't 'appen to see 'im. That's no gentleman's gyne, old chap, like cricket, or any other decent sport. There ain't any honor about it."

The harsh, penetrating voice, with its irritatingly positive intonation, was audible through the greater part of the half-empty smoker. The brown-eyed young man in front, having ceased making even a pretense at reading, was scowling out at the snow-covered landscape. His expression was one of deep indignation. A muscular

hand gripped the edge of the magazine with unconscious force. One foot beat lightly and impatiently on the rod beneath the seat in front of him.

"Huh!" grunted Nelson. "That ain't nothing. I could sit here by the hour, an' tell you a line o' stories that 'u'd make your hair curl. Here's jest one of 'em I calls to mind: A coupla seasons ago there was a fresh young piece o' cheese pitching with us that called himself Fred Moore. At that it wasn't no more his real name than it was mine. He was one o' these college dudes, playing on his college nine; an' then, come vacation, he beats it to some far-off bushes, where he pitches professional ball for the rest of the summer under a false monaker. There's honor for you, ain't it? That's the sort of thing as sickens me of the whole business, an' makes me swear to cut the game the minute I can root out something that'll bring me in enough coin to live on."

He hesitated, his scowling glance resting for a second on the broad shoulders of the man in front. At that moment a dark flush, rising from the immaculate collar, had just reached the edge of that heavy brown mane; but apparently Nelson was too moved by his own eloquence to observe this danger signal.

"It's them college muckers mostly who've put the profession where it is to-day," he went on

hotly. "They cheat to go through college, and afterward in baseball they'll do any crooked thing that'll help 'em to get ahead of some square, decent man. Look at what happened in the Panthers last year. They was both college dudes, you can bet!"

Mr. Tethridge arched his sandy brows in an expression of curiosity.

"W'at was that?" he inquired quickly. "I don't seem to remember what 'appened. Dessey it was after I left."

"It was." Nelson's rather full lips curled at the remembrance. "It was the last game of the season between the Panthers an' Bucks—a double header at that. Didn't make any difference who won. Panthers bound to stay tail-enders, you know. A guy named Benson, playin' third, wanted to boost his hittin' average for the season, so he makes up to Grant, pitchin' for the Bucks. They was both from the same college, and as sure I sit here, ho, every time that crook Benson comes to bat that other crook Grant lets him make a hit. He was up ten times in the two games, and you can guess what that did to his batting average. That's your college ball player all over. Do you wonder I hate the very sight of one?"

Tethridge shook his head slowly.

"Not I," he drawled. "Strynge what rotters education makes of men over hyer. But, I s'y, old

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chap, 'ow is it nobody saw this an' myde a 'owl about it?"

In the barely perceptible pause before Nelson answered, the brown-haired man in the forward seat half turned his head with an impulsive movement, his lips parted as if he meant to speak. His face was flushed, his eyes sparkled with anger, but before he could get in a word the pessimistic ball player was speaking again.

"They did," he answered crisply. "It was too much for even the machine to pull off. The crowd got suspicious, and the reporters took it up. Result was the management had to clear themselves by firing Grant; but, o' course, all he did was to change his name and get a job with another league."

"Are you quite sure about that?"

The new voice, breaking in upon the conversation, was superficially quiet, almost drawling. There was a faint undercurrent of something quite different in it, however, which made Nelson hastily raise his head to stare in annoyed surprise at the man in the forward seat, who had turned round upon them.

"Huh?" he grunted, noting in a flash the keen brown eyes and uncompromising chin of the stranger. "'Course I am. What do you know about it, anyhow?"

"I happen to know that both Benson and Grant

were blacklisted, and never got back into organized baseball," was the ready retort. "Benson's pitching for a wildcat Texas team; Grant's on the Pacific coast. Moreover, you seem to have forgotten that the manager of the Bucks was also dropped by the president of the league, who did everything in his power to show that such scandals would not be tolerated for an instant."

Nelson flushed angrily. "*Is that so?*" he inquired sarcastically. "Reg'lar walking baseball guide, ain't you? I s'pose somebody was kidding you with this song and dance about Benson, an' you swallowed it hook, line, an' sinker. That's about your style."

"Not quite," returned the stranger coolly. "I happened to pitch against him last spring at Ashland, the Hornets' training camp, you know. He calls himself Pete Nevens now."

CHAPTER II

THE MAN WITH THE QUEER EYES

AT the stranger's matter-of-fact reference to a Big League organization which was almost at the top of the tree, Nelson's jaw sagged, and for a second he sat staring at the brown-haired young man in dazed incredulity.

"Is that so?" he sneered again, recovering himself. "On Jim Brennan's pitching staff, are you? What might be the name you sail under?"

"The same one I took with me to the Blue Stockings," was the sharp retort. "Tom Locke."

For a moment there was silence as the two men stared intently at each other. Though he betrayed nothing of what he felt, Lefty was almost startled at this first real glimpse of the stranger's eyes. A moment before he would have called them black, but now they had lightened strangely, as if behind the iris glowed a baleful, almost uncanny fire. There was something so weirdly fascinating in the transformation that the Big League pitcher was unconscious of everything else until Nelson broke the silence.

"Lefty Locke!" he exclaimed triumphantly at

last. "So you're that bird, are you?" He turned promptly to the Englishman, who sat gaping and bewildered. "Tethridge, old man," he said, "let me make you acquainted with a fine specimen of what we was just talking about—one o' them college dudes who makes his living—an' a mighty good one, at that—off'n professional baseball, but who's too ashamed of it to play under his own name."

Lefty's eyes narrowed slightly. "My reasons for not playing under my own name are certainly no affair of yours," he said. "At least, I don't go around blackguarding my profession and every one connected with it."

"Did I say a single thing that wasn't true?" demanded Nelson hotly.

"Only about three-quarters of your remarks, that's all," returned Lefty. "It's the same old bunk you hear every now and then from the fan with a grouch. Because organized baseball is conducted on a big scale and with some outside betting upon it, it's crooked. I couldn't help hearing all you said, and just about every statement you made was—"

"Gospel, an' nothing else," broke in Nelson angrily. "That ticket business in the post season a year ago was so raw it had every newspaper in the country hollering—you can't deny that."

"I don't deny that the ticket sale was badly

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managed," returned Locke. "You noticed probably—since you're so observing—that the speculators didn't have a show last October."

"Mebbe not," snapped Nelson; "but what did happen? The whole thing was cut and dried from the very start. The public was worked to the limit. Whenever there was a chance of the Cubs cinching the pennant before the full seven games had been played, and the limit of gate receipts raked in, then one of their boys would throw a game just to—"

"Ridiculous!" broke in Lefty. He was on his feet now, leaning lightly against the back of the seat ahead of him, with both hands thrust deep in his trousers pockets. Though seemingly quite cool and indifferent, there was a dangerous glitter in his brown eyes, and he was apparently oblivious to the half-dozen other passengers, who had left their seats and moved closer, attracted by the argument.

"Ridiculous!" he repeated emphatically. "You're talking drivel. How could such a thing be done? How could a world-series game possibly be thrown? With two such organizations as the ones fighting it out last fall, what you claim is an absolute impossibility. You, as a ball player, ought to know it as well as I."

Nelson glared in a cold fury. "The Trojans hit Woodby all over the lot in that fifth game—

which never happened before or since," he growled angrily. "If that wasn't done a-purpose to throw the game—"

"Shucks!" derided Lefty. "Do you think he was deliberately throwing away over a thousand dollars bonus? Do you think he wanted the distinction of losing the world's championship for his club? The whole match was fair and square from beginning to end, and organized baseball is as clean and decent a sport as there is."

"Ah, cut it!" broke in Nelson roughly. His big, muscular hands were tightly clenched; his strange eyes glared balefully; his face expressed eloquently the rage he felt for this cool, confident young man who held such an enviable position in major baseball, and who was quietly disproving every one of the busher's contentions with an ease and finality which was maddening. "You're a great piece o' cheese, ain't you, butting into a private conversation where you ain't wanted! S'pose you take the bench and try how it 'u'd feel to mind your own business for a spell!"

Lefty straightened up. His face was somewhat flushed, for there was just enough truth in Nelson's remark to strike home. "If you want to keep a conversation private it's a good idea to refrain from the brand of stuff you've been reeling off by the yard in a voice that everybody in the car could hear. You're the sort of critic

who hunts out the worst possible example he can find and judges a whole big class by that exception. I've heard a few soreheads in the grandstand who talked like you, but I certainly never expected to run against a player—even from the bushes—who blackguarded his profession as you do, and tried to make the sort of stuff you've been handing out pass as the truth."

Nelson leaped to his feet with an imprecation. "You paper-collar dude!" he snarled. "Mebbe you think you can call me a liar and get away with it, but I'll show you!"

He lunged suddenly across the back of the seat, the whole weight of his body behind his hard fist. If the blow had landed on Lefty's chin, as was intended, the altercation would have ended instantly. It happened, however, that Locke moved just at the right moment. Whether it was by accident or design the scattering spectators could not determine. They only knew that Nelson's fist shot harmlessly over the pitcher's shoulder, and the next moment they beheld Lefty standing quietly in the aisle, facing his antagonist.

"You quitter!" cried the latter, leaping out from between the seats. "You needn't think you're going to get away. I'll—"

"Cut that out, young feller!" sounded unexpectedly in a voice of authority. "No scrapping allowed on this train."

A hand gripped Nelson's shoulder with no gentle touch. Still sputtering, the busker twisted around, to behold the stalwart conductor, who was accompanied by a square-shouldered brakeman.

"Cut it, I tell you!" repeated the official sharply, observing the look of indecision on Nelson's face. "This kind of thing don't go here. Get me?"

Evidently the aggressor did. For a second or two he stood glaring darkly at the conductor from those uncanny, evil-looking eyes. Then, with an angry growl, he shook himself free, and stepped back beside Tethridge.

"Wait!" he growled, his angry glance shifting to where Locke stood quietly in the aisle. "I'll get you yet, an' get you good, when there ain't anybody to hide behind."

Lefty made no answer. The threat did not disturb him greatly. His lips curved a little at the corners, and there was a whimsical flicker of amusement in the eyes which rested inquiringly on the conductor's face.

"If you've finished your cigar, Mr. Locke," suggested that official, in a very different tone from the one he had been using, "would you mind going back to the Pullman? This drunk seems to have it in for you bad, and if—"

"I ain't drunk!" exclaimed the indignant Nelson. "I'm aiming to get square with that gink for calling me a liar, an' I will if—"

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The conductor waited to hear no more. Though quite able to preserve peace in an emergency, he never lost a chance to use softer measures when they availed. In the present instance, the removal of the famous pitcher to another car would apparently accomplish his purpose, so he lost no time in bringing that about. With a friendly hand on Locke's arm, and keeping up a flow of pleasant conversation, he made his way down the aisle.

Lefty accompanied him without protest. He disliked anything in the nature of a public rumpus, and was glad to bring the distasteful encounter to an end. At the same time he could not shut his ears to the stream of loud-mouthed taunts which followed him down the car. They brought a touch of color to his cheeks. It was not altogether easy to preserve that attitude of unconsciousness, but he managed it.

CHAPTER III

A MANAGER'S DILEMMA

BACK in his Pullman chair, Lefty tried to forget the unpleasant encounter in the smoker. He realized that there was no one but himself to blame for what had happened, and he regretted the impulsiveness which had made it possible for the disagreeable stranger to drag him into an altercation. Of course, they were never likely to run into each other again, Lefty reflected, yet he did not find that possibility one of unqualified satisfaction. Strangely enough, for one who so disliked brawls and public rows, he discovered himself wishing for a chance to take a little of the bumptiousness out of the man who found so much satisfaction in maligning his own profession.

At length, however, he managed by a determined effort to thrust the matter from his mind and turn his attention to more important things. Kennedy, the lately reinstated manager of the famous Blue Stockings, had wired him to take the first train to Deering, where old Jack spent the few months of the "off season" on the farm.

No reason had been given for this sudden summons to travel over a thousand miles, but Locke had been expecting the message for some time, and was not surprised. It is far from usual for a manager to talk over details of the club personnel and formation with his star pitcher. In the present case the two happened to have been thrown together on more than ordinarily intimate terms in the bush the previous summer, and Kennedy came to know the young Princeton man as few save his closest friends knew him. He came also to have a decided appreciation of Locke's judgment and ability at sizing up a ball player, and after their return to the Blue Stockings late in the season the informal chats inaugurated in the Middle Western town continued at frequent intervals.

"He's getting worried about the make-up of the team," Lefty decided, propping his chin on one hand and staring out over the flat, snow-covered landscape, "and wants to talk it over. I'm not surprised. There'll have to be several holes plugged before we can think of starting after that pennant in April."

The manager of a Big League team is never free from worry and responsibility. The moment the last game of the season is over he begins casting about for material to fill gaps and strengthen the team for the grilling struggle of another sea-

son. The opening of that season is six months away, to be sure, but frequently that time is all too short for what has to be done. The mere fact of not hearing from Kennedy had comforted Locke with the belief that everything was going well. Now, however, it looked as if the manager's schemes were not working 'out quite as he had planned them.

"Wonder where he's fallen down?" mused Lefty. "There's third and center—and more twirlers. I wonder just which particular item is troubling him the most?"

He continued to ponder the question until the porter, with his inevitable whiskbroom, approached to perform the parting rites and pocket the parting quarter. Shortly afterward Lefty swung off the train at the small station of Deering, made straight for the only waiting "cutter," and was presently gliding swiftly over the hard-packed, snowy road, listening to all the latest neighborhood gossip the driver had to retail.

It was good to see again the square, old-fashioned white house, with its wide veranda and the hospitable chimneys, hinting of cheery, crackling open fires; and even better to meet in the hall that lean, lanky, awkward figure with the homely, kindly face and the inimitable smile.

Kennedy was unfeignedly glad to see him, and when the first brief greetings were over he lost

no time in conducting Lefty into his special sanctum and drawing up two chairs before the smoldering logs.

"Spider's sick," he announced laconically, thrusting one hand through his iron-gray mop of hair, which already stood up like the crest of a cockatoo.

"What!" gasped Lefty, in the utmost consternation. "Spider Grant?"

It was an idle question. Among the Blue Stockings there was only one "Spider," that name being the sole property of the peerless first baseman and captain of the team. But in his dismay at this thunderbolt Lefty was not thinking of what he said. The query burst from his lips quite without conscious volition.

"Uh-huh," affirmed the manager; "inflammatory rheumatism. Tough, ain't it?"

"It surely is," agreed Locke fervently. "By Jove, that's the limit! How long has he had it?"

"Couple of weeks. Didn't tell me at first, 'cause he didn't want to worry me. He's mighty consid'rit, Spider is." The kindly smile flickered for an instant out of the network of worried lines, only to vanish quickly again. "But I'd a lot rather have known it before, an' had that much more time."

Lefty nodded understandingly. Unconsciously his face reflected the expression of the older man,

but with the difference that a faint, lightening gleam of hope brought to his eyes.

"Look here, Jack," he said impulsively, "it can't be so bad. Surely there's a chance of his getting over it. He's not old, and he's never had it before that I've heard. Perhaps by the time training season starts—"

"Nix!" put in Kennedy decisively. "I'm taking no chances. He did have it before, two years ago, an' never told no one. Got wet hunting, same as he did this time. No, they never come back—leastwise, not once in a thousand times—an' I'm not gambling with them kind of odds. It's up to me to dig up a new first baseman, and do it in jig time, at that. You know I keep two scouts, Carney and Sackett, working the year round; but every other manager has a bunch of 'em on the rustle, and this digging up of new material is getting more and more difficult ev'ry year. So I'm up against it, and it's close onto the first of February."

A wry, crooked smile flickered on his lips for an instant, then vanished.

"But that's not what I wanted you specially for," he went on rapidly, "though of course I want your opinion of my list of eligibles. You've sized up the situation, I reckon. You know why we were licked in the post-season series."

Lefty did not answer at once. He had dropped

both elbows on his knees, and, with chin resting in cupped hands, was staring thoughtfully at the fire.

"Well," he said slowly at last, "Jack Daly didn't seem to be covering third the way he used to; slow in arching 'em over the diamond, you know. There's no doubt, too, that old Brock is losing his batting eye, or something. He hit under two-eighty last season."

"Exactly. Anything else?"

"You could do with—another twirler on the list."

"I sure could!" Kennedy's tone was emphatic. He bent forward suddenly, his face serious, and emphasized his remarks with upraised finger. "Lefty, this finding the right sort of men for the pitching staff has got me guessing some. Carney found a sweet hitter for center field, an' I reckon we can fill Daly's place somehow; but this other thing—whew! When I came back last fall there wasn't but two first-class twirlers in the crowd—you an' Pete Grist. The others was all right in lots of ways, but you couldn't depend on 'em. That's the main reason we lost the world's series—I didn't have enough men I was sure of to put on the mound. Now, Pete's an old-timer who can't last forever; you see where that puts us. We've simply got to find at least two new pitchers I can rely on, or else drop into second division."

"That's right," Lefty agreed. "Two's the least you could get along with. How've you made out so far?"

Kennedy shook his head slowly. "Nothing to boast of. Got rafts of twirlers, you understand, but they're mostly from the bush, which isn't what I wanted at all. I offered all kinds of money for Donovan, of the Specters, and Hen Wolfer, but nothing doing; they won't loosen up on 'em. My best bet so far is Sackett's find, a lad named Savage who was doing things all last season out West."

"Great spitball artist, isn't he?" inquired Lefty. "I seem to remember reading about him."

"He's got something besides a spitball," Kennedy returned grimly, "or I'd never have looked at him. I never could see a spitter if a man could sneak the ball over any other way. I've watched this boy work several times, and I'm pretty sure we can make something out of him. If I could only find another as promising, believe me, I'd feel easier in my mind."

CHAPTER IV

THE UNEXPECTED

“**T**HAT’S not as easy as it sounds, considering that your scouts have raked the field with a fine-tooth comb,” Lefty said slowly as Kennedy awaited his answer. “Have you thought of Liddell, of Minneapolis?”

“Yes, but they’ve had a man drafted from ’em already. It’s the same with McGargle, of St. Paul, and Jerry Knight, of the Internationals.”

“How about— By Jove! There is a lad who might make good, Jack! He pitched all last season on the Sharks, of the Seaboard League. I saw one of the early games, and he was certainly there with the goods. He kept it up, too, for I got interested in the boy and followed his record. Name’s Temple—Gene Temple—and—”

“Oh, shucks!” interrupted Kennedy, in a disappointed tone. “I know him. He’s nothing but a kid, Lefty. Only out of school a year or so. Bushers need ripening, son. You’re one big exception, of course, but I couldn’t expect that luck again in a hundred years. I’ve got all the raw

material I want—and more, too. What I'm after now is something sure."

"I've an idea you'd find this boy worth trying," was the composed reply; "and you can't exactly call a Class A League the bushes. Wait till I tell you a few things."

Without waiting for the manager's acquiescence, he proceeded to draw from his exceptional memory facts and figures concerning the brief career of this youth from a small Eastern college who had so aroused his interest. Kennedy was bored at first, but soon became attentive.

"Humph!" he grunted. "Mebbe, as you say, he's worth trying. We can draft a man from that club, too. Hanged if I won't do it—or, better yet, I'll let you put through the deal. I'll have my hands full locating a first baseman, and there isn't any time to be lost."

Now that his mind was made up, the manager wasted not a minute in arranging the necessary details. Lefty happened to remember that Temple came from one of the small Jersey towns not far from New York, and it was natural to suppose that he would spend the winter at home. They decided, therefore, that Locke should take the east-bound train which passed through Deering in little more than an hour, and so save a good twelve hours.

Word was sent out to the stableman to hitch up

and have the cutter around in half an hour, and the brief interval of waiting was well occupied by a discussion of every possible candidate for the vacant position at first. Lefty made a number of suggestions, and old Jack had become really cheerful when the sound of sleigh bells brought them out of their chairs.

"Mighty glad we've had this talk, Lefty," said Kennedy, with a friendly hand on Locke's shoulder. "I feel better already. Nail this wonder of yours. Best thing you can do is to bring him South with you. Training for the cubs will start in about ten days, and I reckon you won't mind coming that early, will you?"

"Not a bit, if I can help any," said Lefty, sliding into his heavy overcoat. "Don't come outside. It's cold after sitting in front of that fire. Good-by."

He held out a hand, and Kennedy gripped it.

"So long!" cried the manager. "Remember, this Temple wonder is your find, and if he falls down you can expect to be just about scalped by your Uncle Dudley."

"I'll have to see that he makes good, then," returned Lefty.

A moment later the door had closed behind him. He paused a second to pull up the collar of his ulster, for it had begun to snow. A man was coming up the veranda steps, his figure bulking

indistinctly through the flying flakes. Lefty wondered idly whether he could be the one who was to drive him to the station, and, if so, why he had left the cutter. The fellow stopped before him, and, with a quick intake of astonishment, the Big League pitcher recognized the unpleasant, evil eyes and rough-hewn features of the disgruntled busher he had encountered on the train.

The recognition was mutual. Uttering an exclamation of triumph, Nelson stepped swiftly forward, his fists clenched.

“So it’s you, is it?” he cried. “This is luck! You slipped away from me before, but there ain’t nobody here to hide behind. Put up your hands! Ain’t you got any nerve at all?”

So amazed was Lefty at the appearance of the fellow there, of all places, that for a second or two he stood perfectly still, staring at him.

“Say, have I got to lam you into showin’ a little fight?” fumed Nelson, shaking a fist in Locke’s face. “If you don’t—”

He stopped abruptly as the door was jerked suddenly open to reveal the spare figure of the Blue Stockings’ manager standing on the threshold, his glance flashing from one to the other of the two men.

“Well,” old Jack inquired curtly, “what’s all this about, Savage? What do you mean holding up Locke on his way to make a train?”

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The busher's blustering manner vanished with ludicrous swiftness before the stern glare of Jack Kennedy. He dropped his lids, and, shuffling his feet awkwardly, began a mumbled, halting explanation.

Of this Lefty heard scarcely a word. He was staring dazedly at the flushed, sullen face of the embarrassed minor leaguer. What under the sun did Jack mean by calling him Savage? He couldn't be the new pitcher of whom Kennedy had just been boasting. Distinctly Locke had heard the Englishman on the train call him Nelson—not once, but several times.

"Well, beat it into the house, and I'll talk to you directly," came in the manager's sharp, incisive voice. "Now, Lefty," he went on, when the fellow had vanished, "what the deuce is up? You didn't tell me you knew him."

Locke shrugged his shoulders. "I didn't until a few hours ago. I ran into him on the train, and got mixed up in a little altercation. Did I hear you call him Savage, Jack, or was I mistaken?"

"Sure, he's Savage," Kennedy answered. "Nelson Savage is the new twirler I was telling you about. What you got against him, anyhow?"

Lefty's lips parted, and then closed swiftly. "Oh, nothing," he answered, turning abruptly away. "I was surprised, that's all. Thought his

name was Nelson. Time to get going, Jack. Good-by."

He ran down the steps, and climbed quickly into the cutter waiting there. Once out on the high-road, headed for the village, the driver resumed his gossipy chat, but discovered his companion oddly reticent.

The truth was that Lefty found it impossible to keep his mind off Kennedy's new pitcher, and the more he thought about the fellow the greater became his disapproval. Personally he was not in the least troubled by the discovery that this Savage was destined to become a rival. He could hold his own both on the diamond and off. But dissension and ill feeling always play havoc with a ball team, and here were both with a vengeance. Besides, Lefty's opinion of the newcomer was distinctly unfavorable. A man such as Savage had shown himself to be was not at all the caliber of which first-rate Big League players are made.

"I certainly hope Jack didn't pick a lemon," the twirler said to himself, with a troubled frown; "but I'll be hanged if it don't look that way."

CHAPTER V

THE FACE IN THE MIRROR

ANXIETY continued to be present in Lefty's mind at frequent intervals during the trip East. It made him begin even to doubt his own judgment, and wonder if, after all, he had been wise in recommending a pitcher of whom he really knew nothing personally. It was quite possible that Gene Temple might turn out to be as undesirable as Savage, in spite of the record he had made on the diamond the previous season. All this was not exactly pleasant to contemplate, especially when Lefty recalled the manner in which he had really persuaded Jack Kennedy, against the latter's judgment and inclination, to consent to the trial.

The fact that the Sharks' manager was away and did not return until the second day after Locke's arrival in New York was not calculated to relieve Lefty's worry. When at length he did see Mr. Amos Jillson, however, the latter's demeanor was reassuring. After a momentary flash of annoyance, he began to blackguard Temple strenuously. The fellow was wild, undependable,

even tricky, he said. He'd been thinking, in fact, of sending him back to the bushes again. It was a sure thing that a man of his caliber wouldn't last a week in such an organization as the Blue Stockings.

Knowing the subterfuges of the trade, Lefty listened to it all with bland composure, quite unmoved. When the manager realized what he was up against, he became curt, almost pettish, and went through the formalities of transference with the greatest possible dispatch.

Temple resided with his parents in the neighboring village of Belle View, so Lefty was briefly informed. He had never heard of this rising suburb, and when he tried to reach it by means of a very circuitous trolley line, he hoped fervently that he might never have occasion to seek it again.

It had been dark for over an hour when he finally alighted from the car, stiff, cold, and decidedly hungry. Had he entertained the least conception of the time required to make the journey, it would certainly have been put off until the next day. But once he had found Temple, the interview was not likely to take long. Then he could get a bite to eat and find some way of returning more directly to New York and civilization.

The fairly well-lighted main street of Belle View was lined with small shops in trim new buildings.

Most of them were closed, but the brilliant windows of one attracted Lefty's eye. He had almost reached the door, perceiving with approval that it was a clean, neat-looking little restaurant, when the sight of a railroad track flanked by an exceedingly up-to-date station of stucco made him give a deep sigh of thankfulness.

Within five minutes he had learned from the ticket seller everything he wished to know. New York, by underground, was exactly twenty-eight minutes away. There was a train at seven-forty-three, and another at nine-forty-five. It was now a few minutes before seven. Eight minutes' brisk walking would bring him to the Temple house.

It did not take Lefty long to make up his mind. If he stopped to get something to eat first, he would miss the earlier train, and be in for a tiresome wait of more than two hours. By hunting up Temple at once, dinner would be delayed not more than half or three-quarters of an hour longer, and he could have it in quiet comfort at his own hotel. With a word of thanks to the communicative agent, the pitcher hastily left the station, and walked briskly up the street.

Three blocks straight ahead, the man had said, two blocks to the left, then turn to the right, and take the house on the next right-hand corner. Lefty found the blocks inordinately long, as country blocks are likely to be, but there was no

difficulty whatever in following the agent's directions to the letter.

"Some class to this town!" the ball player reflected as he turned the last corner, on which stood an attractive concrete bungalow. "Next right-hand corner, he said. That would be it at the end of the block."

There were only three houses in the entire block, which was shorter than the others he had traversed. The concrete bungalow occupied the first corner; then came a low, rambling house set back from the street, and gleaming hospitably with lights. A long stretch of vacant property followed before the neat hedge and well-kept grounds of the Temple place were reached.

This house also stood well back from the street, and Lefty was halfway up the walk before he noticed how dark and gloomy it seemed. A clump of evergreens shielded it from the street light. Not a solitary gleam showed in any one of the many windows. Either the place was equipped with peculiarly opaque shutters or there were no lights inside the house to show.

"I hope the whole family isn't out," grumbled Lefty, as he ran up the veranda steps.

The doorway was a colonial one, with long, narrow, diamond-paned windows on each side. Before ringing, Locke paused to peer through one of these. It was not drawn shades or closed shutters

which gave that air of gloominess to the place. There were no lights in the hall or anywhere else in the front of the house that he could see. There was a momentary pause before Lefty's hand reached toward the bell. He would at least make absolutely certain that there was no one at home before leaving the place. There might be a servant somewhere about, or possibly—

He caught his breath sharply. The fingers feeling for the electric button stiffened. From the farther end of the hall a glare of light suddenly flashed up in a startling, wholly inexplicable manner which was bewildering. For a minute or two Lefty stood there, staring dazedly, before his lips curved in a grin of understanding.

The light was not in the hall at all. It shone through a door in the right-hand wall, full upon a high, massive mirror standing in the opposite corner. All in a flash Lefty took in the heavy, gilded frame and the low, old-fashioned marble-topped stand on which it rested. Then his eyes widened at what he saw reflected in the glass.

Only a very limited portion of the room was visible. A bit of green wall, with part of a wide black picture frame, showed distinctly, while in the foreground, bending over a table, the figure of a man in a check suit interested Lefty amazingly. There was something puzzlingly familiar about those square, muscular shoulders, the set of the

head, the very sleekness of the crisp black hair. The fellow could not be Temple, who was a pronounced blond; yet the Blue Stocking pitcher was possessed with the certainty of having seen the man before.

A moment later the stranger, straightening up, turned toward the door, and Locke gasped as he recognized the face of Nelson Savage.

CHAPTER VI

SUSPICIOUS DENIALS

LEFTY'S first thought was that he had been deceived by a superficial resemblance, coupled with the tricks played by a faulty mirror. But swiftly that explanation vanished. For a full minute the man stood quite still against the table, staring thoughtfully out into the darkened hall. The lights from above shone full on his face, bringing out even in the reflection every little detail of form and coloring. Hair, eyes, features—all were identical. It was Jack Kennedy's newest recruit without the possibility of a doubt. As he realized this Locke's eyes narrowed, and the muscles of his jaw hardened.

It was puzzling enough, after having left Savage on Jack's farm, a thousand miles away, to come upon him three days later in this New Jersey suburb; but to find him on apparently friendly terms with Gene Temple was even more surprising, and a great deal more unpleasant. He had not supposed the two to be even casually acquainted. They came from opposite extremes of

the continent, and had never, so far as Locke was aware, even played in the same game.

Recovering quickly from his surprise, Lefty followed the actions of the bush pitcher with the closest attention. There was no questioning the air of being at home which was betrayed in his every action. After that momentary pause under the light, he squared his shoulders decisively, and walked out into the hall, returning in a moment with something in his hand. Just what it was Lefty could not see, for the fellow stepped out of range at once. During the next five minutes or so the glass reflected only tantalizing glimpses of him moving about the room.

What he was doing the watcher could not determine, nor was he inordinately curious. His mind was taken up to a much greater extent in wondering whether Gene Temple was also in the house. So far, nothing had been seen of the Seaboard pitcher, yet it was hard to believe that Savage was here alone.

Suddenly Locke's hand reached for the bell, but he paused, his finger tips just touching the button. His impulse had been to ring and see what would happen, but he repressed it. If Temple was there he would doubtless come to the door, and Lefty was not so sure he cared about talking with the fellow just now. He wanted time to digest his discovery, to readjust his mind to the realization

that Temple was apparently on intimate terms with an individual for whom Lefty hadn't the slightest use. It might make a radical difference in his actions. One recruit of Savage's caliber was quite enough in the training camp, Locke reflected. Under the circumstances, he might decide that he had no use for Gene Temple, after all.

So, instead of ringing, Lefty went quietly down the steps and along the flagged walk to the street. Instinctively he retraced his steps to Main Street, moved, perhaps, by a subconscious picture of the clean little restaurant on the corner. But all the while his mind was going over and over the problem which had so suddenly confronted him, and he was trying his best to decide what he ought to do. It seemed unjust to condemn a man unheard, yet if Temple was not a friend of Savage how else was it possible to account for what Locke had just seen?

Brief as had been their acquaintance, Lefty's dislike and disapproval of the Western busher was acute, and by the time he reached the main street he had decided to have nothing to do with any of the fellow's friends. He had also decided that the sooner everything was straightened out and settled the better. He wished now he had obeyed that first impulse to rouse Temple at the house.

"There'll be no trotting back to New York until

I've located the fellow and straightened things out," the pitcher said as he opened the restaurant door and stepped into the warm, brightly lighted interior.

As he closed the door and turned to one of the bare-topped, shiny tables that ran along one side of the room, he heard an exclamation of surprise from a tall young man in a heavy ulster who was just turning away from the cigar stand:

"Jumping Jemimah! Why, it's Lefty Locke!"

Since the triumphant finish of the past season, Lefty had received about as much adulation as any professional in the Big League. Wherever he went enthusiastic fans treated him with that mixture of deference and friendliness which is so characteristic of fans the country over. Lefty made no pretense of being bored. He looked upon it all as part of the game, and felt that some slight occasional inconvenience was little enough to pay for the fame which had come to him. It amused him to have people recognize him in street cars and public places. Even the inevitable string of small boys, with awe-struck faces, camping on his trail, did not annoy him. In the field he rather liked to hear the bleacherites roar out that "Oh, you Lefty!" in tones of fond proprietorship. He felt that the greater part of it was genuine; that people really did like him, and were proud of him. And to treat such honest admiration with indiffer-

ence or disdain would be churlish, ill bred, impossible.

As he turned now, with a faint, friendly smile for the man who had spoken so impulsively, he saw a tall, well-built fellow, with laughing gray eyes set in a face which was almost too good looking. It was a face which, once seen, was not likely to be forgotten, and, after that first brief flash of surprise, Lefty's smile deepened to one of pleased satisfaction.

"How are you, Temple?" he said quietly, putting out his hand.

"Fine as silk!" was the reply before an expression of dazed bewilderment leaped into the gray eyes. "But how the deuce— Say, you're Lefty Locke, of the Blue Stockings, aren't you?"

"Sure thing!"

"But I don't understand how you know my name. I'm sure I never met you before, though I've seen you in the box, of course."

His voice was low and pleasant; his gaze frank, direct, and steady. As the Big League pitcher slipped out of his coat and hung it up, he found himself warming already to the stranger.

"It doesn't seem to occur to you that I might also have seen *you* pitch," he suggested.

Temple laughed. "You might, but that's different; I'm next door to the bushes."

Locke shrugged his shoulders, and moved

toward one of the tables. The room was almost empty, a man and woman at the rear being the only other patrons. A single waitress hovered at a little distance, waiting for the latest patron to settle himself.

"I happened to see you pitch a game early last spring," Lefty explained, "and I don't often forget a face."

He paused, one hand on the back of a chair, his eyes fixed intently on Temple's. He had suddenly made up his mind to settle the whole affair without delay.

"I'm going to ask you a question which may strike you as rather peculiar," he resumed abruptly. "How long have you known Nelson Savage?"

The younger pitcher suddenly stubbed his toe against a rubber mat, and dropped the lighted cigar he was carrying. He bent instinctively to pick it up; then, changing his mind, set his heel on the glowing end, and took a fresh one from his pocket.

"Nelson Savage?" he repeated blankly. "I'm afraid I don't get you, quite. Who is he?"

Locke's face hardened perceptibly. He had not expected such a barefaced denial. He hesitated an instant, still holding Temple's gaze in thrall. It seemed remarkable that the gray eyes never wavered or shifted.

"It's rather odd that you should ask that," he remarked coldly, "when he's making himself at home at this very moment in your house."

Temple's jaw sagged; the match he had just struck slipped unheeded through his fingers.

"You're—kidding me—aren't you?" he stammered.

Lefty made a negative motion of his head, and, pulling out the chair, sat down. "I have just come from there," he returned. "I saw him."

Still with that dazed expression on his face, Temple came close to the table, and, bending over, gripped the edge of it with both hands. The action crumpled his cigar into fragments, but apparently he was unconscious of it. He was staring at the older man with a look of bewilderment which could scarcely have been counterfeited. When finally he broke the silence his words came in jerks.

"You say—there's a man—named Savage in my house—now—this minute?" he gasped. "You saw him—there?"

A gleam of fresh interest flashed into Lefty's eyes; the hard line of his compressed lips softened. Either this man was genuinely surprised and disturbed or else he was an amazing actor.

"I certainly did," the Blue Stocking pitcher returned, in a less chilly tone; "not more than fifteen or twenty minutes ago."

Temple straightened abruptly, with a decisive squaring of his shoulders. He began to button his ulster.

“Then he’s there for no good purpose,” he said. “I know of no one who has any business there. My people are away—visiting in Boston. The house is closed—unoccupied, except when I go there to sleep. Whoever this man Savage is, it looks to me as if he’d broken in to steal, and if he has—good night!”

He swung abruptly away from the table, and strode toward the door. Lefty stared after him for a second; then, springing up, he grabbed coat and hat, and followed.

CHAPTER VII

THE BLUNDER

WHAT little conversation passed between the two men as they hurried toward the Temple house was spasmodic and choppy. Briefly Lefty explained how he had come to see Savage. The younger man asked no questions, and was apparently not even curious to know what Locke could want with him. He seemed, in fact, to be answering mechanically, as if his brain was all the time occupied with some other phase of the situation; and, naturally, the Blue Stockings' pitcher quickly relapsed into silence.

He himself was in a condition of puzzled doubt and uncertainty which gave him plenty to think about. Much as he disliked Nelson Savage, he did not wish to believe that the man would deliberately break into a house for the purpose of stealing. Not only would it be an act of incredible folly, but the coincidence of his traveling a thousand miles to rob the home of Gene Temple was too startling to credit.

Yet, if that were not the true explanation, Tem-

ple himself must be an unmitigated liar, his every action deliberately intended to deceive. Lefty found this quite as hard to believe, and he decided to reserve judgment until he had a little more to work on.

"In five minutes I'll know," he said to himself as they hastened around the corner by the concrete bungalow. "It's one of the queerest things— Say, Temple, where are you going?"

The last sentence was uttered aloud in a surprised tone, for the blond young man had turned abruptly in at the bungalow gate, and was striding up the walk. At the sound of Locke's voice he slowed down a bit and glanced over his shoulder.

"Going!" he echoed guardedly. "I'm hustling to pinch this housebreaker before he makes a get-away."

Locke caught his breath sharply. "You don't mean to say you live *here*?"

"I sure do!" Temple's tone was puzzled. "Where'd you think I lived?"

A wave of crimson surged over Lefty's face at the realization of the blunder he had made.

"But the man said the next corner!" he exclaimed indignantly. "Doesn't the idiot know—"

He broke off with a sudden deep chuckle as his keen sense of humor came belatedly to his rescue. "I was talking about the wrong house all the time," he exclaimed. "Wouldn't that get you!"

His face still puzzled, the younger ball player turned hurriedly and came back to Locke's side.

"You mean the house on the next corner?" he asked quickly. "Was that where you saw this—Savage?"

"Sure thing!" answered Lefty. "Peach of a bull, wasn't it? But the fool agent said the next corner, and how was I to know he meant this one?"

Temple's lips began to twitch and his eyes to crinkle. A second later he threw back his head and burst into a shout of laughter, genuine, infectious, yet with a note in it of such relief that Lefty stared at him curiously. It wasn't possible that such a chap could have been nervous at the prospect of tackling a sneak thief.

"I can't help it," Temple said half apologetically when the violence of his mirth had begun to subside. "It seemed to strike me as funny—our hustling up the way we did. You certainly did get my goat for a bit, though," he went on frankly. "I've been careless, leaving things around, and wasn't keen about having 'em swiped. Besides, I couldn't for the life of me make out why anybody'd break into a house so early in the evening. Of course, since it was at Markham's you saw him, he probably didn't break in at all. Likely he's a friend of Harry's."

"Hum! Possibly, though the whole business

still seems rather odd. Who is this Markham, by the way?"

They were standing together beside the gate. Temple's manner had altered amazingly, becoming in a flash light-hearted and jocular.

"Manager of Crawford's sporting-goods shop," he answered. "Who's this Savage, anyway—pugilist, ball player, or what?"

"A twirler from the sagebrush," answered Lefty absently.

He was thinking over the affair, and there were certain details which still seemed peculiar—such, for example, as the assurance which the fellow showed in moving about the apparently empty house. Lefty had half a mind to go on to Markham's and see if he could solve the mystery.

"That accounts for it," Temple went on. "Harry knows more scrappers and ball players than you could count in a week. Well, what do you say to going back? I'd ask you into the house, only it's like a barn, and there's not a thing to eat around. Since the folks left, I've only been showing up to sleep, and sometimes not even for that. You were going to order supper at Mike's, weren't you?"

The Blue Stockings' pitcher nodded, and swung through the gate beside Temple, both starting to retrace their steps toward the restaurant. Remembering Savage's belligerent attitude at part-

ing, Lefty was not especially keen about stirring up something very likely to terminate in a fight. At least, Temple was cleared of all foreknowledge of the Western twirler, which was the principal thing just now.

It was not until they were seated on opposite sides of the neat table, and the waitress had taken Locke's order, that his companion broached the subject which must have been in his mind for some little time.

"Did you—er—come to Belle View on purpose to—see me?" he asked, with a touch of embarrassed hesitation.

Lefty smiled. "Yes," he answered quietly. "I secured you for Jack Kennedy this afternoon."

Temple's eyes widened, and a tide of deep crimson surged to the very roots of his blond hair.

"You can't mean—" he stammered, his hands gripping the table edge with unconscious force. "It isn't possible that the Blue Stockings want—Oh, say!" His face took on an expression of whimsical disbelief. "You're kidding me!"

"Not this time. I came East on purpose to get you for Kennedy's squad. Saw Jillson to-day, and now you're a Blue Stocking cub. Hope you're not sorry?"

"Sorry!" cried Temple, bringing down one clenched fist with a crash that made the dishes rattle. "Sorry! Why, I'd rather be that than

anything else on earth! It's the Big League club that I've always put ahead of all the others, but I never thought— Do you s'pose there's a chance of my making good?"

"If there wasn't," returned Lefty briefly, "you'd hardly have been picked by Jack Kennedy."

The man's modesty was refreshing, and his boyish impulsiveness held in it an inexplicable attraction for the more famous player. Before supper was over they were chatting together like old friends. When train time approached Temple helped the Big League pitcher into his heavy coat, and walked across to the station with him.

It lacked ten minutes or more of train time, so the two paced briskly up and down the length of the concrete platform, smoking, and making arrangements for their meeting a few days later to go South together.

"I'd sure like to make the trip with you," Temple said enthusiastically as they passed one of the waiting-room windows. "That'll give me time to see the folks, and— Mighty!"

He broke off with sudden vehemence, and, ripping open his coat, glanced at his watch. Scarcely seeming to look at it, he jammed it back, his face frowning and troubled.

"Had a date at nine," he explained rapidly to his companion. "Went clean out of my head.

Say, would you mind if I cut out now? Perhaps I can square myself yet."

"Go ahead, by all means," replied Lefty, thrusting out a gloved hand. "Good-by. Don't forget where we're to meet."

Temple gripped the pitcher's outstretched hand and wrung it.

"Not on your life!" he cried. "I've got it all straight. Hotel St. Albans next Tuesday for lunch. Awfully sorry to go this way, but you understand?"

Without even waiting for a reply, he turned and hurried along the platform, almost at a run. Lefty was still watching him, a faint smile on his lips, when the slamming of the station door made him glance carelessly around.

A square-shouldered, youngish man was standing by the door, pulling on a glove. His face was in the shadow, but a moment later he picked up his suit case and strolled directly toward Lefty. The latter watched him curiously, as one observes a lone fellow passenger at a country station. Then, as the unknown stepped into the circle of the nearest arc light, Locke caught his breath, every muscle stiffening instinctively as if he were bracing himself to withstand an inevitable shock. An instant later he had regained his composure.

"I hardly expected to see you quite so soon again, Savage," he drawled coolly.

CHAPTER VIII

THE TRANSFORMATION

IN the brief, tense pause which followed, Lefty's dominating emotion was one of thankfulness that the station platform was deserted. The much delayed fight seemed bound to come off there and then, and Locke was not sorry. It was high time the fellow was shown a thing or two, and the Blue Stockings' twirler was not in the least averse to playing the part of instructor. He did object, however, to playing that part before a crowd of witnesses.

Determined to let Savage make the first hostile move, the Big League player deliberately held himself in check, standing quietly, watching his antagonist, and wondering why he did not begin. There was not enough light for him to catch the play of expression on the bushier's face; consequently the shock of surprise which followed the fellow's first words was doubly great.

"So soon?" Savage repeated at length, in a quiet, almost drawling voice. "Surely there's been plenty of time for me to get here."

Lefty stared at him dazedly for a second before

he could find his voice. It was so totally different from what he had expected that for a moment he could not believe he had heard aright. Then the realization came suddenly that Savage was playing some game.

"Oh, plenty," he answered calmly; "only the time was so short I scarcely thought you'd be coming East."

Savage shrugged his shoulders, and put down the suitcase. "I don't remember saying that I wasn't," he returned quietly. "Have a cigarette?"

He extended an open box, and Lefty, retaining his composure with no little difficulty, accepted one. He refused to let this blustering braggart outdo him in self-control. What the man's game was he had not the remotest idea, but he was certain two could play at it, and he promptly proceeded to "stall along" until he could get the run of the cards.

"Thanks," he murmured nonchalantly, and produced a match box from his ulster pocket. "Light?"

As the flame flickered up Savage bent slightly toward it, his face clearly outlined to the smallest detail. Lefty, staring intently at him, could not detect a sign of that ungovernable fury which had characterized the busher at their first meeting less than a week before. He seemed as calm and un-

ruffled as if he had never worked himself into a violent temper at the man who had accepted his cigarette and who was now holding a lighted match for him.

The whole thing was such an anti-climax that Lefty could have laughed aloud had he not been so bewildered. As it was, he decided to let Savage do the talking, at least until he could determine how things really stood. With that idea in mind, he took his time, aware from the sound of the rapidly approaching train that a fresh diversion was coming to his assistance.

"Mind the smoker?" inquired Savage as the engine thundered past them. "We may as well sit together, then. It'll make the time pass quicker."

Locke acquiesced briefly, and they climbed aboard, picking out a seat. They were no sooner settled than Savage made some whimsical comments on two queer-looking characters sitting in front of them, and the Big League twirler, to his amazement, found himself chuckling appreciatively at his companion's dry humor.

It seemed incredible, yet he was actually finding the fellow likable. Tossing away the end of his cigarette, he pulled out a couple of cigars, and passed one over. Had any one predicted the action half an hour before, Lefty would have pronounced that person insane.

"From the way we parted," he said with sudden impulsiveness, "I'd hardly have said we'd be chumming it this way to-night."

Savage, busily cutting the end of his cigar, did not look up.

"Yes?" he murmured. "How so?"

Lefty stared. He had smelled liquor on the busher the afternoon they first met, but the man could scarcely have been so under the influence as to have no recollection of their altercation.

"You surely haven't forgotten that you wanted to lick the pants off me?" he asked.

The smile vanished from the Westerner's lips, and a flush swept into his face. "I'm sorry you remember it so vividly, Locke," he said, in a low, rather constrained tone. Lefty wondered whither had vanished all his slang and coarseness. "I must have been more of a beast than I thought." He hesitated, his slim fingers nervously rolling the cigar between them. "I was feeling pretty rotten that day. I had more booze in me than was healthy. And— Well, you understand, old man, how a fellow sometimes does things he's ashamed of."

He raised his head suddenly, and looked straight at Lefty with steady, level eyes which seemed to hold a hint of appeal in them. For a second Locke could have sworn that they were not the eyes of Savage at all, they were so totally differ-

ent from the lowering, evil-looking orbs he remembered. Then he realized that it was simply the absence of that baleful, uncanny glare which had impressed him so disagreeably. They were human now—human and winning, and decidedly attractive.

Suddenly Locke found himself answering the unspoken appeal eagerly.

“Forget it!” he said forcibly. “You don’t suppose I took it as seriously as that, do you? I was giving you a little josh, that’s all. Let’s get on to something else. How’d you make out with Jack?”

“He’s going to give me a show,” Savage answered briefly. “Great chap, Kennedy.”

“You bet your life he is!”

It was a subject on which Lefty could hold forth indefinitely, and when the train pulled into Jersey City he found that he had been doing most of the talking for twenty minutes or so. The announcement from Savage that he was going over to Brooklyn resulted in an unexpectedly hurried parting, and Locke had settled down in the uptown tunnel train before he realized that there were a number of things he had neglected to find out from the busher—among them the explanation of his curious actions in the Markham house.

“Doesn’t make any difference, I reckon,” he decided at length. “I’ll see him again in less than a week. By George, what a transforma-

tion!" He shook his head slowly. "It's amazing. He's human now, and not a bad sort at all. I s'pose it must be drink that does it. Jove! If I had a devil like that inside me, which liquor unchained, it would be me for the sprinkler, and no dropping off either."

CHAPTER IX

THE TRAINING CAMP

DELAYED by a blizzard, Lefty and Gene Temple did not reach the sleepy little Southern town of Tulane until the second day of the spring training. Kennedy and his crowd of recruits had left for the ball park some time before, so the two belated ones stopped at the hotel only long enough to change into their baseball clothes before following them.

After the bitter cold, the snow and general disagreeableness, which they had left behind so short a time ago, there was an infinite relaxation in the soft, caressing warmth and brilliant sunshine of this Southern clime. The sky was deep blue, and cloudless. The trees were just bursting into bud, their branches covered with a delicate tracery of tender green. From the fresh-plowed fields came the indescribable odor of new-turned earth. Somewhere a bird was caroling joyously.

There was something about it all which sent a thrill through the Blue Stockings' pitcher, bringing back in a vivid flash the remembrance of this time a year ago, when he had appeared, unknown

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and unwelcome, at the Texas training camp of the famous Hornets.

His experience there had been fraught with much hard feeling. It was exceptional, to be sure; but it had, nevertheless, been the cause of his looking forward to the trip this year with the reverse of pleasure. He had never actually clothed the dislike with conscious thought. He was not even fully aware of it until this very moment, when, with his blood beginning to tingle in his veins, he drew in the soft, fragrant air in deep gulps, and realized that the prejudice had vanished, that he was glad to be alive and here.

"Pretty slick, isn't it?" he said aloud, glancing at Temple.

The latter nodded, and answered with a brief affirmative. His face was slightly flushed; his eyes were bright. Lefty smiled a little as he realized that the youngster was just where he had been a year ago—eager, dubious, thrilled with anticipation, devoured with curiosity, and more than a little nervous. It made Locke appear older and amazingly experienced. That single year which separated him from Temple seemed infinitely longer in retrospection than it had been in passing.

Presently the long line of unpainted high board fence showed ahead of them, and instinctively the two players broke into a trot. Neither of

them spoke. Their spikes sank into the warm earth. Their eyes were fixed upon the arching spheres of white that curved into view above the fence, to fall swiftly away in swallow flight below that line of dingy boardings.

Through the gate they trotted; then Lefty halted for a moment, eying with interest the busy scene. Scattered over the field were eighteen or twenty men, in uniforms of various sorts, engaged in almost equally varied exercises. Some merely tossed a baseball back and forth slowly, stiffly, and with occasional facial contortions which made Lefty grin sympathetically. He knew from experience the discomfort, almost the torture, of that "second" morning. Half a dozen were passing the medicine ball about a circle. In front of the stand others were batting the slow, straight balls pitched to them by Jack Kennedy himself.

As Locke took it all in, he felt again that tingling thrill of enthusiasm. In spite of the toil and drudgery, the aches and pains and stiffness ahead of him, he saw the distant goal lying beyond everything, and was glad to be here.

"Take it easy, Mac!" sounded in old Jack's crisp tones. "You may want some of that smoke later on."

Chuckling, Locke moved forward, closely followed by Temple. A moment later the manager was gripping the southpaw's hand and asking the

inevitable questions in that earnest tone of his which robbed it of its perfunctoriness.

"Fine!" responded Lefty promptly. "Held up by a blizzard north of Washington, but I reckon it won't take long to catch up with the bunch. This is Gene Temple, Jack."

Kennedy shook hands with the recruit, his keen dark eyes sweeping over the youngster from head to foot.

"You look pretty fit," he commented. "A mite soft, maybe, but we'll soon fix that. Just take my place for a bit. Straight, easy balls, you know. We don't want any fireworks yet a while."

Handing over the ball, he stepped aside and watched Temple for a few minutes, correcting him when he seemed to be putting on a little too much speed.

"Hardest thing in the world to keep 'em down at first," he said, turning to Lefty, with a grim smile. "He won't hardly be able to move that wing to-morrow morning if he ain't careful."

"Don't I know it!" laughed Locke as they moved a little farther back, where the manager could overlook the entire squad. "Well, how's tricks? I suppose Nels Savage showed up all right?"

Kennedy flashed a swift, oddly inquiring glance at his premier pitcher.

"What makes you ask that?" he asked briefly.

"Because I'm interested," was the equally brief answer.

"Hum!" Kennedy's eyes shifted out across the field. "Easy, there, Coombs! Don't put too much on the old soup bone!" he yelled. Then he glanced back at Lefty. "I didn't know he was such a friend o' yours," he went on quietly. "It sure didn't seem so, the way you met up on my porch a couple of weeks ago."

The southpaw laughed. "We weren't then," he explained. "Can't say that we're so awful chummy now, either. I just happened to run into him again around New York, and changed the opinion I'd formed of him when we first met."

"That so?" drawled the manager. "Funny—but I did the same identical thing, only it wasn't a change for the better. I'm afraid Sackett picked a lemon that time. He's a booze fighter. I landed here Monday night, and he showed up next morning, full as a tick and devilish! There ain't any other word to express it. When he's got a load aboard he's the limit. I reckon he must have been in that condition when you first ran into him."

"Guess he was," returned Lefty. "Jove, that's mighty hard lines, Jack! Sober, he's as decent a chap as you'd want around. What are you going to do—ship him back to the sticks?"

Kennedy's eyes snapped. "Not unless I have

to. I'm going to boost him aboard the water wagon, and keep him there. He hasn't had a drop since he landed here, and I'll see that he don't get it. There's a chance to make something good out of him if he'll only do a little trying on his own hook, for he's pretty clever with the horsehide."

"Don't you worry about that, Jack," the pitcher forcibly assured him, a remembrance of Savage's brief, halting half confession on the train flashing into his mind. "He'll work with you, all right, or I've got him sized up far wrong. I reckon he must be one of those poor devils who let alcohol get a strangle hold, and then can't shake it off. I'll do anything I can to help—if you care to have me."

"Good idea," agreed Kennedy, pulling out his watch. "I can't have him in sight every minute. Well, it's time we were breaking up the morning session. I'll see you at the hotel, Lefty. I got to chase down and send a wire to Larry. He's on the road with some theater company, and I haven't located him yet."

Turning away, he raised his voice in a stentorian shout: "Everybody run in!" Then he made straight for a horse and buggy hitched in the shadow of the stand.

For a minute or two Lefty stood watching the players as they stopped instantly whatever they

were doing and jogged toward the gate. Then, recognizing Savage as one of those who had been in the medicine-ball circle, his eyes brightened, and he moved hastily forward.

He hadn't the least idea of trying anything so crude as an open attempt at reformation. He simply wanted to say a word of greeting to the man he had taken such a decided interest in; he wished to renew the pleasant intercourse which had been cut off so abruptly that night on the platform of the Hudson River tube. So he ran after the square-shouldered, muscular figure bringing up the rear of the jogging line, and clapped him on the back in a friendly fashion.

"Well, old scout, how goes it?" he cried. "Glad to see you escaped from the wilds of Brooklyn all right."

The busher stopped abruptly, whirling round with a savage yank that jerked his shoulder from Locke's light touch.

"Keep your hands off me!" he snarled, glaring balefully from under lowering brows. "What in blazes do you mean, pawing me like that? If we was only away by our two selves I'd knock the dome off you so quick you wouldn't know what hit you!"

For a moment Lefty stared in utter astonishment at the dark, sneering face, with its snarling lips and evil, glowering eyes. There was no smell

of liquor about the fellow; he was absolutely sober.

Suddenly the sting of those unprovoked insults penetrated that mental armor of bewildered amazement. It sent the crimson tide of indignation surging into Locke's face; brought a hard, cold glint into his eyes. A swift side glance told him that the last straggler had almost reached the gate. He took a step forward, and regarded Savage for a moment from under drooping lids.

"You've been shooting off considerable hot air since I first saw you," he remarked coldly. "I'm rather curious to know if there's anything back of it. We're never likely to be more alone than we are this minute. Suppose you start in with that licking you've been blowing so much about? Come ahead! I'm ready."

CHAPTER X

A PERPLEXING QUESTION

SAVAGE made no effort to accept Lefty's militant invitation. He did not stir or utter a word, but remained glaring at Locke with a concentration which gave the southpaw a queer and decidedly unpleasant sensation. He was vividly reminded of an occasion when he had stood before one of the glass dens in the Bronx Park reptile house, staring into the bright, evil eyes of a very active cobra which had reared itself belligerently.

The stillness became oddly prolonged. The bushy's eyes seemed to widen and grow larger. Locke was conscious of a peculiar sense of lethargy which changed swiftly to irritation at the fellow who seemed to be trying to stare him down. Suddenly he gave a determined shake of his head.

"Well," he demanded curtly, "aren't you going to start something?"

Savage drew back abruptly, an expression akin to disappointment flickering across his face.

"Say," he rasped harshly, "what kind of a sucker do you think I am? I'd start to beat you

up in this ball park, and how soon do you s'pose it would be before Kennedy landed on my neck?"

"Who's going to put him wise?"

"If I once got going right you'd sure be a walking advertisement of what had happened. The whole crowd would be wise soon as they lamped you. Nix! You don't get me in bad with the old man that way!"

Lefty's lips curled. "Sure that's the real reason?" he inquired sarcastically. "Looks to me as if you were crawling."

The busher's fists clenched and his face flushed darkly. For a second it seemed that he meant to fly at the throat of the man who had taunted him. Locke's muscles stiffened; he braced himself instinctively to withstand the shock. But it never came.

"It won't work," growled Savage through his clenched teeth. "I'll get you before I'm through, but not until I have a place with this crowd cinched. Another thing—there ain't a bit of use in your coming around with that soft stuff, 'cause it don't go. I don't like a hair of your head, and trying that brand o' bunk will only start ructions—see?"

The last word had scarcely left his lips when he turned and strode rapidly across the field toward the gate. Lefty, scarlet with rage at the insulting tone, took half a dozen swift steps after him be-

fore cooling second thought put on the brake. It was one thing to defend himself against assault, quite another deliberately to start a rough-house, in spite of even as great a provocation as this. It would be a poor way in which to repay Kennedy's exceptional faith in him by fostering what the manager feared above almost any other calamity—dissension and hard feeling among members of his team.

"Just about one more crack like that, though, and you'll get yours," muttered the southpaw angrily, coming to a halt. "Jove, what a mucker! He ought to have the rudiments of decency beaten into his thick skull with a club. Soft stuff—bah!"

To a man whose friendship and acquaintance was sought with a frequency which is almost tiresome, the insinuation that he would deliberately try to win over such a creature as this by flattery was irritating to the limit. Nor was Lefty's irritation at all assuaged by the realization that in a far-fetched sort of way he had placed himself open to the annoyance.

"But how could I know he'd be like this?" he growled as he moved slowly toward the gate, his face still crimson with indignation. "Jack said he was sober—and so he was. How could a fellow guess that any human being would change like that? Why, on the train he was as decent a sort—"

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He broke off abruptly, with a start of surprise, the anger in his face giving place swiftly to puzzled thoughtfulness. How did he know that the fellow had ever really changed? Might not that pose of friendliness have been altogether a pretense?

Such a supposition would indicate amazing ability at acting on the part of this crude individual from the Western bushes, but it was far from impossible. Even more difficult to understand was the man's motive in perpetuating such a deception. Why should his manner toward Lefty be so different in Belle View from that shown at Deering, or later here in Georgia? What had he gained, or hoped to gain, by a pose which must have been not only difficult but extremely onerous?

The question puzzled Locke all the way back to the hotel. He could think of no plausible answer save that Savage had desired to divert attention from some one or something in the quiet Jersey suburb. It was a bit far-fetched, perhaps, yet by assuming that guise of friendliness he had certainly so surprised and engrossed Lefty as to make him totally forgetful of the odd circumstance of the busher's presence in the little country town.

If this supposition were correct, a lot of puzzling queries leaped into life like Hydra heads. None was more difficult than the last of all which popped suddenly into the southpaw's mind, just

as he came within sight of the hotel: Why had Savage refused to fight?

The obvious explanation would have been: Because he was afraid—because, like most loud-mouthed, blustering braggarts, he was a coward at heart. But Lefty had a strong impression that this was not the case. Much as he disliked the man, he had never had the least doubt of his courage. The ruffian had been ready enough twice before to resort to violence. What motive held him back now?

CHAPTER XI

▲ VOICE OUT OF DARKNESS

THANKS to the irritating nature of the encounter on the field, and the swarm of unanswerable questions it had aroused, Lefty entered the hotel in a decidedly ill humor. The delight and keen enthusiasm he had felt that morning were quite gone; in their place had come a sense of ill treatment.

After the sacrifice he had made in coming down ahead of the other regulars, and practically giving a week of his time to coaching these raw recruits from all over the country, it seemed as if fortune had played him a scurvy trick by bringing into his sphere such an irritant as Nelson Savage was likely to become.

“Wonder if I didn’t make a mistake, after all, in keeping my hands off him?” muttered Lefty, glancing around the lobby. “There won’t be any living with the dog until he’s been taken down by a thorough thrashing, and— Well, for Pete’s sake, look who’s here!”

In a flash the frown was swept from his face by a grin of surprised delight as he leaped toward

the tall, wiry young man who stood at one end of the desk, talking and laughing with Jack Kennedy.

"Al, you old villain," he cried, gripping the newcomer's hands in both of his, "where the deuce do you hail from? I'm certainly glad to see that homely mug of yours again."

Al Ogan's response to the greeting was equally hearty. The two had been fellow-cubs a year before in peppery Jim Brennan's famous Hornet organization, and Lefty had got along better with the clever young infielder than with any other member of the team except his particular chum, Buck Fargo.

"Haven't been doing a thing in the twirling line since I saw you last, have you?" Ogan inquired, one arm resting on Locke's shoulder. "It's a wonder you wouldn't get a wiggle on and make some kind of a reputation for yourself."

The southpaw laughed. "Time enough for that, old scout. We're likely to show you a trick or two this season. But, say, what in the name of sense brought you down here? What license have you got to come snooping around our promising growth from the timber regions?"

Ogan showed a fine set of teeth in a wide grin. "Doesn't seem to occur to you that I might be here for the purpose of giving you rubes a few lessons in the art of playing the national game," he remarked, with twinkling eyes.

Lefty stared. "You're kidding, aren't you?" he asked, darting a swift, inquiring glance at Kennedy.

Evidently there was something in the latter's face which gave away the situation, for Locke suddenly brought his open palm down across the manager's shoulders with a force which shook old Jack.

"Why, you deceiving old reprobate!" exclaimed the pitcher. "So this is how you filled Spider's place? I'll be hanged! Never even gave me a chance to ask what luck you had with first. It was on the tip of my tongue three or four times this morning, but you always choked me off."

"Thought I'd give you a surprise," chuckled Kennedy. "From the way you looked a while back, I should say you needed one. What's eating you, anyhow?"

Lefty had not the slightest intention of letting either man know of his clash with Savage; it would savor entirely too much of talebearing to suit him. He smiled blandly, convincingly, and shrugged his shoulders.

"Nothing," he drawled. "No, Jack, if I seemed at all serious, it must have been caused by the thought of wasting a perfectly good week of freedom watching you do the Solomon act with this crowd from the sagebrush. Now that Al's here, life will be more bearable."

Kennedy laughed and moved away toward the proprietor's office, leaving Locke and Ogan to talk things over.

Lefty was more than pleased at the encounter. The young Ohioan was a college graduate and a good fellow in every sense of the word. Personally Locke had always liked him, and just at present he would have welcomed a much less agreeable member of the old squad. It gave him some one of his own status to talk to; some one who knew men and conditions of the baseball world, and who did not spend any time either eying the famous southpaw with surreptitious awe, or jealously tearing to pieces his hard-earned reputation.

Within ten minutes the two had decided to room together. They sat side by side in the dining-room, and when the hour for afternoon practice approached went out to the field together.

Without appearing to do so, Lefty kept an observant eye that afternoon on Nelson Savage, and discovered, as he rather expected to, that the fellow was not a general favorite. So far as could be seen, he was on speaking terms with just two members of the squad. The remainder of the recruits he treated with contemptuous disdain; if one could judge by the biting comments cast in his direction, the dislike was mutual.

Of course it was impossible at this early day to obtain any idea of his professional skill. Beyond

handling a baseball with a certain amount of deftness, he showed no particular ability; nor was he likely to for some time to come. As for his physical condition, Lefty was surprised at the discovery that the fellow was much too heavy, and extremely short-winded. He puffed and panted when he joined the file that Kennedy led at a trot around the inside of the fence; and he didn't last five minutes when lured into the diabolical "high-low" game.

Many of the other recruits were out of condition, but none of them quite as badly as this, and Locke naturally laid it to the busher's intemperate habits. That evening after dinner, sitting in the lobby with Kennedy and Ogan, a quick suspicion came to him at the sight of Savage slipping out of the hotel alone.

"I thought you were keeping an eye on that fellow, Jack?" he remarked, in a low tone. "What's to prevent him digging up some redeye in the village?"

Kennedy laughed, leaning back comfortably. "Evidently you don't know Tulane, son. The place is so dry that a quart of bourbon would look like the flood. Only way he could smuggle it in is on the railroad, and the boys are all good friends of mine that I've tipped off to look out for that sort of thing. Unsociable grouch, ain't he? Goes

off alone 'most every night just like that. You'd think he'd get tired of himself, wouldn't you?"

"Where does he go?" Lefty asked.

"Oh, moving pictures, I reckon. I followed him the first couple of times, and found him down there." He yawned. "There ain't no danger of his getting firewater now. The trouble'll come when the push lands on us. They're supposed to be on the water wagon, an' most of 'em are; but you know how some of 'em carry flasks for colds, which they're likely to leave around permiscuous-like."

Lefty could not take the manager's easy-going point of view. He knew that in country towns like Tulane the films are sometimes changed only once a week—never oftener than twice weekly. Unless a man was an absolute crank on the subject, he could scarcely care to see the same series of pictures three or four times in succession. It looked rather as if the busker had been clever enough to prepare a sort of alibi for himself which made it possible for him to slip away every evening without arousing the manager's suspicions.

Presently Kennedy went off to write letters. A few moments later Locke and Ogan strolled into the billiard room to see if there was anything doing. They found a flourishing game of draw

in progress, and, being urged to "sit in," Ogan succumbed without a struggle. Lefty shook his head, however, watched the play absently for a few minutes, and finally walked out through the lobby into the street. He had given in to the pull of mingled curiosity and conscience, and found not a particle of pleasure in doing so.

Tulane was certainly small, and, at night, at least, most undoubtedly "dead." It supported two moving-picture establishments, nevertheless, which rather weakened the southpaw's theory regarding Savage's inability to find continued amusement at picture-plays, but did not make him abandon his determination to learn if such was the man's practice.

Entering the Palace Theater, he was fortunate in finding the lights up for the accommodation of a vaudeville turn. The seating capacity was not large, and in five minutes he was certain that Savage was not in the place. At the Tulane Opera House the wait was longer, but the result the same. By the time he had reached the street again Lefty's interest in the search had quite swallowed up the reluctance with which he had started it.

The question now was, not to pick and choose from a multitude of places where Savage might have gone, but to hunt out one solitary spot or

building which would attract the fellow or serve the purpose which Lefty felt sure was moving him.

A baker's shop was open, Locke discovered as he moved slowly down the street; but its feeble light was the only one flickering amid the rows of low-fronted, quaint old shops. It was like hunting a needle in a haystack.

Presently, without any hope of success, the pitcher wandered through some of the rambling, curving residence streets near the river. Here the lights, save those from the houses themselves, were few and far between, and there seemed so little chance of anything doing that he was about to turn back when he became suddenly aware that two people were approaching from the direction of the river road.

Stopping abruptly, he heard the murmur of men's voices; but the darkness was so intense that it was impossible to see more than the shadowy outlines of objects a dozen feet away. For a moment he hesitated; then, stepping back against the hedge which bordered the place on his right, he found he could easily push through. A second later he was standing on the other side of the flowering magnolia shrubs.

The action had been governed by impulse—and just the faintest suggestion of familiarity in one

of the unknown voices. Almost immediately the raucous, angry accents of Nelson Savage reached Lefty's ears.

"Why, you fresh young squirt!" said the pitcher to his companion. "I've got a good mind to put old Kennedy wise to what I know."

There was a momentary pause, during which the steps sounded loud and clear, as if the men were passing on the other side of the hedge. In his desire to find out who the other person was, Locke bent eagerly forward, his ears strained.

"I hardly think you'll do that," came at length in a low, composed voice. "You see, I happen to know a thing or two myself, and I might be forced in self-defense—"

That was all. The man did not cease speaking, but a movement of his head, or a little eddy of wind, perhaps, turned the words into an unrecognizable murmur.

Lefty did not need anything further. Already he had heard enough to amaze him. The voice of the second man was that of Gene Temple.

CHAPTER XII

A BIT OF A STAGGERER

LOCKE could scarcely believe his senses. Temple with Nels Savage, and showing by his words every evidence of a previous acquaintance! It seemed almost impossible. During the past week the southpaw had seen a good deal of the latest recruit to the Blue Stockings' pitching staff, and the close proximity of a three days' railroad journey, instead of opening Lefty's eyes to unexpected defects in his companion's character, had served, rather, to make him like the blond youngster even more than he had at first. Temple could not be said to possess any extraordinary mental strength or depth, but he was certainly likable, and it was difficult to believe that he had deliberately lied.

Yet how else was the affair to be explained? The voice of that second passer-by was Temple's, Lefty was certain. Back in Belle View the fellow had denied any previous acquaintance with the Western twirler. There was only one inference to draw, much as Locke might dislike the idea or consider it incredible.

All this passed through the latter's mind in the few seconds while he stood crouching behind the magnolia hedge, waiting for the men to get far enough away for him to emerge without fear of detection.

Determined to prove his suspicions and become absolutely certain, Lefty's first impulse was to follow the two until a street light enabled him to see with his own eyes. But as he pushed through the hedge and paused for an instant on the sidewalk, a better way occurred to him. Knowing little about the streets and byways of Tulane, he had, nevertheless, a shrewd notion that the way he had come was shorter by far than the route the others seemed to be following back to the hotel. By swiftly retracing his steps, he could reach the lobby ahead of them.

Silently he slipped back to the entrance of the narrow lane through which he had reached the river road, and darted into it. Five minutes later he emerged on a wider street and made all speed toward the lighted corner beyond, which he remembered turning not a great while after leaving Main Street.

As he made this hurried, silent progress through the fragrant darkness and quiet of the village streets, his mind was keenly active. With this latest discovery several suspicious happenings in Belle View, unnoticed at the time, came back with

swift, vivid significance. Temple's manner when he had first heard of Savage's presence in the town had been just a little odd. Considering the circumstances, it was hardly natural for a chap of his sort to be so greatly upset by the incident of a strange person seen in his house; his intense relief at the discovery of the truth had been proportionately queer. At the station, too, that sudden recollection of a forgotten engagement had been oddly timed with Savage's appearance.

"Might easily have caught a glimpse of Savage through the window, and used that excuse to beat it before the man came out and saw him," reflected Lefty as he turned into Main Street and hastily approached the hotel. "I'd certainly never have thought he was that sort, hanged if I would!" His face clouded disappointedly, and he frowned slightly. "Even now it doesn't seem like him. Well, I'll know in a jiffy just what's what."

A swift glance down the street showed nothing of the ill-assorted pair, and Locke wasted no time entering the hotel. The lobby was deserted save for the desk clerk, invisible behind an open newspaper; from the billiard room came sounds of talk and laughter which brought the southpaw over to the doorway.

The poker game was still in progress, and gathered about the table was a ring of spectators which accounted easily for the empty lobby. Neither

Temple nor Savage was there; this Locke assured himself with a slight nod of satisfaction. He was about to turn back to the lobby when he discovered that Al Ogan was likewise missing.

For a second he paused, brows arching in surprise. The first baseman was a poker fiend, if ever one lived; to imagine him voluntarily dropping out of a game was difficult.

"What happened to Al, Mac?" the pitcher asked abruptly. "Thought he'd stay with you all the evening."

"Huh?" absently grunted Jack Mackentire, raising his eyes from the cards. "Oh! Why, a kid came in with a note for him, and he beat it without saying where he was going. Didn't seem keen about leaving, either. Want him special?"

"Oh, no," said Lefty. "He'll be back soon, I guess."

It seemed a rather curious performance, for Ogan had only just arrived, and could scarcely have any friends in the place outside the squad. Still, it was none of Lefty's business, and the southpaw turned back toward the lobby.

As he passed through the doorway he stopped short with a gasp of amazement. Just emerging from the little cubby-hole of a writing-room—a spot patronized mainly by drummers and their ilk—was Gene Temple. He was in the act of stretching luxuriously, head thrown back, mouth gaping,

arms extended. Clasped in one hand were three sealed letters, written on the hotel stationery.

“Why, I thought—” began Locke. His teeth came together with a click as he realized that he had been speaking aloud.

Temple came forward, smiling. “Nothing gives a fellow a more virtuous feeling than answering a bunch of letters,” he drawled. “Look at those.”

Lefty had already observed them. “Must have taken you most of the time since dinner,” he said, with swiftly returning composure.

“Not quite; but I’ve been at it—”

Whether the sentence was ever finished or not the southpaw was quite unaware. He was standing where, by shifting his glance a trifle to the left, he commanded an uninterrupted view of the main entrance. The sound of voices made him glance thither now. The sight of Al Ogan entering with Nelson Savage, and talking to the fellow with all the seeming good humor in the world, was enough to drive every other thought from the pitcher’s bewildered brain.

CHAPTER XIII

WHICH ONE?

“LETTERS generally are a nuisance,” Lefty found himself saying, in an instinctive effort at self-control. “I’d certainly like to have mine all written up.”

He wondered if his voice sounded as queerly to Temple as it did to himself. The youngster’s face showed no particular surprise; perhaps he was too immersed in his own thoughts to notice the oddness of his companion’s tone.

Locke’s eyes were fixed on the two men crossing the lobby; his mind was striving to find some reason or explanation for their being together. Ogan could not have been the one he had heard while crouching behind the magnolia hedge. He had never even seen Savage before this afternoon, much less known him in the intimate fashion indicated by the few words Lefty had overheard. He must have met the fellow by accident—perhaps just outside the door. It was absurd to suppose there was any prearrangement about it.

Temple moved away with a casual remark about posting his letters. The other two came on, headed for the billiard room door. Savage passed

the southpaw without a word, and with a sneering uptwist of the lips which at any other time would have made Locke long to hit him. Just now, however, Lefty was too intent on something else even to notice it.

The busher's face was flushed, his eyes were a bit glassy, his breath fairly reeked with the smell of liquor. In spite of Kennedy's confidence to the contrary, the man had found a way to get whisky in the sleepy little town of Tulane.

With wrinkled forehead and puzzled eyes, the southpaw turned and watched the man enter the billiard room. How had the thing been managed? Had some one broken faith, or was there an element of mystery in the affair which—

“A bit more, and he'd have as nice a little load aboard as you'd want to see.”

The voice at his elbow was low and drawling, with an undercurrent of laughter in it. For a fraction of a second, Lefty found himself wondering how in creation Temple could have returned so soon from posting his letters. Then suddenly he realized that it wasn't Temple at all—could not possibly be, and, whirling, he looked into Al Ogan's smiling countenance.

As he stood staring, Locke felt that his face was flushing visibly. Had the tangled affair begun so to wear upon his mind that even for a second he could mistake one man's voice for another's?

"I wonder—where—he got it?" he managed to stammer at last.

"Give it up," said Ogan, occupied with lighting a cigarette. "He had it when I—er—ran into him a while ago—down the street."

Lefty drew a long breath; the blood began to flow normally through his veins again. The likeness was still there; his mind had not been playing tricks. Certain tones and inflections of Ogan's voice were almost identical with Temple's. He had never noticed it before, but that was probably because he had never compared the two. In a second the southpaw was smiling his old careless, good-humored smile, and declining a cigarette from Ogan's proffered box.

"Guess I won't, thanks," he said. "I'm cutting 'em out except one after meals. Rather a good one on Jack, isn't it? He was so sure there was no bugjuice to be found in Tulane. You must have beat it out of here sort of unexpected, old man."

The infielder stepped past his friend and glanced into the billiard room. "Oh, I don't know," he returned over his shoulder. "I got tired of the game."

Locke raised his eyebrows. It was difficult to imagine this possible.

"Going to sit in again now?" he asked indifferently.

“Nix! It’s me for the hay when I finish this smoke.”

He turned from the open door, and dropped down on one of the leather chairs facing the main entrance. Lefty followed, outwardly indifferent, but in reality keenly observant. Whether Ogan was lying or telling the truth, there was certainly something on his mind, and while the southpaw was still curious as to what it might be, he no longer felt that phase of the mystery to be vital.

Whether it was Ogan or Temple he had heard covertly threatening Savage was really of no great consequence, after all. It was unpleasant, to be sure, and vastly disappointing, to realize that one of the men he had come to like so well was deceiving him; but that was all. Of much greater importance was the learning of where and how Savage obtained his liquor. To this end Lefty meant to devote some of his spare time.

Temple returned presently from posting his letters. After a few casual remarks, he departed for his room, leaving the southpaw puzzled anew at the odd likeness of those two voices, and wondering why he had failed to notice it before. He was still pondering when the poker session broke up and the crowd sauntered back into the lobby with much talk and laughter.

Only Savage seemed in a state of persistent ill temper. He stood close by, growling at Pete

Zacher, one of the few members of the squad who tolerated him at all; and Lefty could readily believe old Jack's statement that the fellow was "fairly devilish" when he was drinking.

"That's some classy ring you've got, bo," he heard Zacher remark suddenly. "Let's take a slant at it for a minute."

He indicated a heavy gold ring, oddly carved, which Locke had noticed before on the little finger of the busher's left hand. Savage scowled.

"It ain't never been off my finger, an' I'm not going to take it off now," he grunted disagreeably. "I guess you'll manage to live without lamping it any closer."

It was not so much what he actually said as the nasty manner in which the words were spoken that caused Locke to turn away disgustedly and start Ogan on his way to bed.

"The ill-mannered mule!" he muttered under his breath as he crossed the lobby beside his friend. "I'm hanged if I bother my head any more about him! He can lap up all the jingle juice between here and New York for all I care. Let him accumulate a roaring jag and start an all-round rough-house so that he'll get the sack. I'm not going to stir a finger to prevent it."

All this "listened well," as Ogan would have said had it reached his ears; but deep down within him Lefty knew that he didn't mean it. He was

aware that the following evening would probably see him playing the thankless rôle of sleuth in an effort to discover Savage's secret and keep the promise he had rashly made to Jack Kennedy.

CHAPTER XIV

ON THE TRAIL

THE pitcher's intuition proved accurate save in one particular. From necessity, not choice, he fully expected to do his detective work alone. Neither Temple nor Ogan was to be trusted. He did not mean to trouble Kennedy until something definite had been discovered. And there was no one else.

Returning from morning practice, however, Lefty had scarcely set foot in the hotel lobby when he was staggered by the full weight of one hundred and fifty pounds of solid bone and muscle landing violently against him. His first impulse was to return the assault with interest. Then, recognizing in time the freckled face and snapping brown eyes of his classmate, Jack Stillman, he contented himself with a blow on the latter's shoulders which brought an involuntary grunt from the reporter.

"Still the same impulsive young thing," said Locke. "Does a chap good to pipe that freckled phiz of yours after watching a field of uninteresting bushers all the morning."

"They can't all be like you, kid," chuckled Stillman as they gripped each other's hands firmly. "Well, how's tricks? What sort of a bunch has Jack pulled in from the tall timbers this year? Any ginger in 'em?"

"Oh, fair. It's a wonder, though, you wouldn't get on the job with the rest of the ink slingers. What's the *Star* doing without those yarns of yours that tell so little with such a flow of language?"

Stillman grinned. "It doesn't have to do without them," he said, with an airy wave of his hand. "They're showing up in their proper column every day. You see, I had to chase out and cover the Dawson City fight, and that delayed me three days. The boss was for sending down an understudy, but I wouldn't listen to that. Told him to leave it to me, and he'd have his stuff right on the dot. I had to dope out the copy before I left."

"Before you left?" repeated Lefty amusedly.

"Sure! Nothing ever happens in a training camp the first few days, except getting stiff and sore, and limbering up. Kennedy gave me a few tips just before he left home, and so the faking was dead easy. I headed one column with a nice little pome written especially for the occasion, trimmed the whiskers off a lot of prehistoric dope, and there you are."

Lefty laughed. Stillman could usually be

100 LEFTY O' THE TRAINING CAMP

counted on for doing the unexpected, and there were few dull moments in training camp after his arrival.

"I hope the poetry was guaranteed strictly original and—fresh," the southpaw remarked as they moved toward the stairs.

"You bet!" returned the reporter. "Some of it was so fresh that old Deering said it was raw."

He paused before the desk, and, striking an attitude, solemnly declaimed:

"It seems most humiliating,
When you've made a perfect slide,
To be blamed for stealing, just because
The base was occupied."

"How's that?" he inquired, without the shadow of a smile. "Got Rudyard Kip and Damon Runyon fanning, hey? Don't like it? Hump! No accounting for tastes. Maybe this'll suit you better. I tossed it off with a couple of dozen other little quatrains and rondeaus and sonnets on the train right after breakfast:

"His fielding average may be low;
It really doesn't matter,
If he hits 'em on the nose
Whene'er they nick the platter."

"Help!" gasped Lefty, laying violent hands on the poetic one. "That's enough. They're worse than the soup ads in the street cars."

He swept the newspaper man irresistibly out of the lobby and up the uncarpeted stairs.

"You certainly are one faker!" he chuckled as they reached the second floor. "Cut out that stuff for a bit, though, and listen to me." His face grew suddenly serious. "There's something doing here that's about got my goat, Jack. Suppose you focus the light of your keen old brain on the mystery, and see if you can't do the Sherlock Holmes act."

Stillman shed his light and airy manner, and was instantly all attention and interest. There was no keener mind on the staff of the big metropolitan daily, and more than once he had earned the praise of the city editor by a neat bit of detective work. Locke did not find it possible now to go into the matter in any great detail, for Ogan was already back from his shower when they reached the room. Before lunch time, however, he managed to give his friend the essential particulars, and on the way to the field they discussed every phase of the situation.

"You're right in not bothering with Temple or Ogan," decided Stillman. "One of 'em knew this Savage before, of course; but that's not important. The main thing is to find where he gets his ardent. If he cuts away again to-night we'll be ready for him."

Stillman devoted the better part of the after-

noon to an exhaustive study of the sagebrush twirler. The opinion he formed of the man was far from flattering.

"Gee, that dill pickle must hate himself!" he remarked to Lefty as they were returning to the hotel. "Of course, the stiff may turn out to be a little baby wonder on wheels, but as it looks now I'd call him a dead loss. He's the kind that would have a whole club fighting in two shakes, and—honest, old man—the best thing we can do is to give him all the rope he wants, and let him hang himself."

This had been Lefty's real opinion for some time, but his promise to Kennedy, and a sort of ethical determination to do the best he could for a rival, made him reluctant to act upon it. The two friends were still discussing the matter when old Jack caught up with them.

"Look here, son," he began briefly, taking Locke's arm, "McLean tells me Savage had half a jag on last night. Is that straight?"

The southpaw hesitated an instant. "I'd hardly call it that," he answered. "He'd been hitting the bottle a bit, but he wasn't exactly loaded."

"By mighty!" exploded the manager. "You knew, an' never put me wise! I thought you was going to help me out? I can't see everything that goes on. Why in—"

"Take it easy," said Lefty. "I wasn't holding back on you. I just didn't want to get you all riled up before I had something to tell. It was this way."

Briefly he narrated the scanty details he had gleaned the night before, ending with the suggestion that the best way of straightening out the affair would be to send Savage back to the bushes.

"Not yet," returned the manager, his jaw squaring obstinately. "I told you once before that I was going to make something out of him. I've handled others as bad—or worse. I want to find out where he gets the stuff, and it's up to you to help out. You ain't got nothing to do, and if he cuts away to-night you and Jack can follow him as well as not."

Of course Locke gave in. He felt that he owed Jack Kennedy a great deal, and he was ready to go to much more trouble for him than the loss of a single evening would involve. As soon as dinner was over Stillman and Lefty strolled out into the lobby, where, while apparently occupied in light conversation, they kept a close watch on the movements of Nelson Savage.

They had only a short time to wait. The object of their attention did not even sit down. After inquiring fruitlessly for mail, he lounged against the desk for a minute or two; then, moving toward

the door with exaggerated carelessness, he disappeared into the street.

Within thirty seconds Locke and the reporter were standing by the steps, watching the square-shouldered figure swing along Main Street in the direction of the moving-picture houses—also the river road.

“Same way he came back last night,” Lefty commented, in a whisper.

Stillman nodded, leading the way across the street. They moved swiftly forward, keeping well in the shadows. When Savage had passed the bright lights of the Tulane Opera House and vanished into the dusky stretches beyond, the pursuers hurriedly decreased the intervening distance until they could distinguish the sound of the man's feet as he strode briskly along the graveled walk.

Now and then the sound ceased, as if the bushers were listening for possible indications of pursuit. Each time the pair behind him stopped also, though they had been walking with the utmost care in the soft dust of the country road.

At length Savage seemed satisfied that he had aroused no suspicion, and thereafter there were no more halts or backward glances. Briskly he strode on past fences and trim hedges, past twinkling lights, past black, deserted stretches, or tall white columns gleaming vague and ghostlike in the starlight.

More than once the two friends wondered silently where he could be leading them. Each one was game and meant to stick it out as long as his companion; so they tramped on, out along the lonely river road, until suddenly the sound of Savage's footfalls ceased abruptly.

They did not grow gradually less and less, finally to die away. There was no noticeable pause or lagging in the step before the last. At one instant they heard the brisk, regular sound of the man's feet in the dusty road; at the next—nothing.

CHAPTER XV

THE GUILF OF SAVAGE

IN a flash the men behind stopped, too, and stood listening with straining ears. In the sudden stillness which seemed to have fallen over everything the lazy lapping of the sluggish river sounded as distinct and clear as if they stood on its very bank. Lefty found himself wondering whether Savage might not have stepped off into the water. Then, realizing the absurdity of such a thing, he felt Stillman's hand drawing him to one side of the road.

There was a chance that Savage might have heard them and was stealing back to make sure. Instinctively they both drew still farther back against some alder bushes, hoping thus to escape discovery and the consequent ruin of their plans.

At length, however, as the silence continued, it became evident that the Westerner was making no such move. He had either remained where he had first stopped, or, exercising extreme caution, he had drawn away without their having the least suspicion in which direction he had gone.

"The gink has taken to the grass," Stillman

whispered, in a chagrined tone, his lips close to the southpaw's ear. "Come ahead, slow and careful, now."

Cautiously they crept forward, making not the least sound in the thick grass that bordered the road. Savage could not have been more than thirty feet ahead of them, but when they had made that distance there was no more sight or sound of him than there had been at the beginning. A few minutes later something square and shadowy loomed indistinctly on the left—something which their exploring fingers told them presently was the rough wall of a small frame building, weatherworn, and not too solidly made.

"Boathouse, I reckon," Stillman muttered, after a momentary pause. "Thunder! If the man's gone off in a boat it certainly puts us in Dutch, my son."

"Perhaps he hasn't gone," Lefty suggested, in the same cautious whisper. "Maybe he's inside."

The words had scarcely passed his lips before a slight thud sounded from the other side of the building. It was followed by a scraping noise, then a splash which started both listeners, as if moved by the same thought, toward the nearest corner of the shack. Owing to the need for silence, no less than their ignorance of the lay of the land, it took a minute or so for them to reach a point

overlooking the river. There they stopped abruptly, peering through the thin mist that floated above the water and seemed strangely to give a vaguely luminous touch to the shadowy scene.

A small boat, vigorously propelled by a single oarsman, was slipping out of sight through the mist. After it had disappeared the rhythmical splash of the oars came clearly back to the listeners' ears.

"Thunder!" muttered the reporter. "He's going across. I wish that—"

"If there's another boat inside, we could follow him," Locke broke in suddenly. "He can't be going very far—look at the time he was back last night."

"Come on," hissed Stillman, moving swiftly along the front of the house. "Here's the door. Now, let's see if there's anything doing."

He entered hurriedly, followed by Lefty. A moment later the flash of a small pocket torch circled about the interior of the boathouse and then winked out again. The place was dingy and forlorn looking. The rotting floor was covered with dust save where a single boat had evidently rested. There was no other craft of any sort to be seen.

"Stung!" remarked Stillman briefly.

There was silence for a moment before he flashed the light on again. Lefty blinked a little

as the glare struck his eyes. His forehead was puckered thoughtfully.

"I suppose we could come down here in the daytime," he said, "and find out what sort of a place he goes to over there. There can't be so many joints within a short distance where he could get booze that it would be much of a job to pick the right one."

"It's either that or get hold of a boat and be ready to follow him some other night," the reporter returned. "Your plan would be easier. Anyhow, there's nothing doing now but to go back and tell old Jack what we've run up against. He's liable to be gone two or three hours, and I'm not going to hang around this hole all the evening for the good of a big stiff the club would be a whole lot better without. Kennedy makes me sick about this man, anyhow. Savage wouldn't last two days with any other manager."

Lefty promptly agreeing with him, they made a more thorough inspection of the shack without discovering anything helpful, then departed.

Back in the hotel, Kennedy listened to their story in noncommittal silence, but with an ominous tightening of the jaws which boded little good for the delinquent recruit. Later the manager was observed by several to take up a position in the lobby from which he could view both the main entrance and the stairs. He carried several news-

papers, and nothing could induce him to move from the place.

At nine o'clock some of the fellows, stiff and weary from the day's work, drifted to bed. Kennedy sat on. An hour later only the devotees of draw poker and one or two sleepy onlookers remained, but still the manager had not stirred. Eleven found him the sole occupant of the lobby.

The big clock over the desk indicated scarcely five minutes past the hour when a quick step sounded outside, and Savage entered. Without glancing to right or left, he walked briskly toward the stairs.

Kennedy was there ahead of him.

"Here, you!" he said sharply as he faced the busher. "What in thunder do you mean staying out to this hour? Where've you been?"

Savage flushed, and looked as if he longed to snap back, but didn't quite dare.

"I went for a walk," he retorted sullenly. "Got farther off than I thought—that's all."

"Humph!" grunted Kennedy skeptically. "A walk! It listens well!"

He stepped suddenly forward, and, catching a lapel of the busher's coat in one hand, deliberately sniffed the fellow's breath. To his surprise, he caught not the faintest odor of alcohol. He sniffed again; then, stepping back, surveyed Savage meditatively.

“Well, if you haven’t been pouring it down, you’ve brought it back in a bottle,” he said, in a tone which was almost disappointed.

Regardless of the man’s angry glare, he went through his clothes with as much cool deliberation as if Savage had been a wooden dummy in a tailor shop. The search was productive of nothing whatever in the shape of flask or bottle. The bushier’s face wore an expression of satisfaction.

“Awful smart, ain’t you?” he sneered. “Maybe you’d like me to strip so’s you can be sure it ain’t under my clothes.”

Kennedy surveyed him coldly. “You beat it upstairs,” he ordered suddenly, “and don’t waste any time turning in.”

Left alone, the manager followed slowly, his face perplexed. He was perfectly sure that Savage had lied to him, yet he could not prove it. The feeling that he had been tricked by this bushier from the tall timbers was extremely unpalatable to old Jack, and kept him awake long after he had tumbled into bed.

It thus happened that when a thin trickle of smoke curled in at his transom he had only begun to doze off. The pungent tang of it in his nostrils brought him out of bed in a single leap. In another second, yanking open the door into the hall, he saw by the light of a flaring gas jet that the smoke came through the transom of the room

next his own—the room occupied by Nelson Savage.

Fortunately most of the locks in the old Holcombe House were not noted for any great strength. A single surging blow of the manager's wiry body sufficed to tear the screws of this one out of the tindery wood. The door burst open, letting Kennedy in with a rush.

The lights were going full blast. Still fully dressed, Savage lay across the bed, the blankets of which were smoldering briskly, giving out an ever-increasing volume of choking smoke. Scattered over the floor were several cigarette butts. Tucked under the unconscious man's arm was a quart bottle, while the fumes of alcohol arose even above the smell of burning wool.

Kennedy seemed to take in these details even as he was leaping for the washstand. A deluge from the water pitcher instantly quenched the smoldering blanket, but Savage was too far gone to do more than grunt and hug his bottle tighter. An examination of the latter revealed less than two inches of cheap liquor remaining. The bushier had apparently consumed the rest, for bits of tinfoil lying about showed the bottle to have been freshly opened.

With set jaw and angry eyes, Kennedy jerked the bottle from Savage's unconscious grip, and hurled it through the open window. As he did so,

he discovered, fastened to the bureau, a length of heavy cord sufficient to reach within a few feet of the ground.

“So that was how he worked it!” muttered the older man, his eyes fixed scornfully on the figure sprawling before him. “Left the string hanging down, an’ tied the bottle to it before coming in. Suffering snakes! If I didn’t have to have somebody besides Lefty and that kid Temple to pitch for the boys, you’d hike back to the sticks so fast you’d hit only the high places. Anyhow, your goose is done brown. It’s the can for yours the minute the old bunch shows up and get their soup bones into working order.”

CHAPTER XVI

THE REGULARS ARRIVE

KENNEDY was determined to find out where the busher got his liquor. Savage's attitude next day greatly strengthened that determination. Not only did he refuse to tell anything about it, but he brazenly denied having had anything intoxicating at all. He reeled off a lot of ancient stuff about taking colic medicine, which struck the manager temporarily dumb.

Recovering, old Jack spat out some verbal vitriol which made even Savage wince. Kennedy then held confab with Jack Stillman, after which the reporter proceeded to corner the hotel proprietor, and, with his usual dexterity, painlessly extract the facts he sought. They were brief and singularly discouraging. The land across the river for almost a mile in either direction was owned by one Caspar Livermore, a well-to-do planter and horse breeder. Mr. Livermore was not only extremely penurious, but had the reputation of being a prohibitionist of the deepest dye, to whom the mere mention of intoxicants was like

a red rag to a bull. There were no other habitations of any sort save the hut of a decrepit old negro woman, reputed among the superstitiously inclined of her race to have dealings with the devil. Even that hut, which was on Livermore land, stood a good half-mile above the rotten old boathouse.

"Looks as if the old lady might bear investigating," Stillman said afterward to Locke, "though it's usually safe to be suspicious of these guys that throw a fit at the sight of a whisky advertisement. They're often the kind who lap up sixty per cent. alcohol patent medicines by the gallon. I reckon I'd better hunt up a boat, and be ready in case there's anything doing to-night."

With considerable difficulty, he managed to locate a flat-bottomed scow, which he conveyed by the sweat of his brow to a point about a quarter of a mile above the boathouse. Unfortunately, after all this labor, there was no occasion to use it that night. After dinner Savage lounged around the lobby in solitary silence for half an hour or so. At half past seven he sallied forth to one of the moving-picture shows. Lefty and Stillman were both prepared to swear that this time he not only entered the Palace Theater, but remained there until the last foot of film had been shown. That over, he returned to the hotel, and treated himself to the luxury of several wordy altercations before bedtime.

Kennedy was annoyed by their report. The desire to learn the source of the perplexing pitcher's drink supply was becoming an obsession with the manager, and he urged them to continue their sleuthing. To this both ball player and newspaper man agreed. They, too, were becoming more than vexed at the success which seemed to attend Savage's every maneuver.

Hustling back from the field that afternoon, however, every thought of the delinquent busher was driven from Lefty's brain by the sight of four men lounging in the hotel lobby. They were cleanly built, well set-up specimens, remarkable mainly for the almost miraculous fit of their very up-to-date garments, and for rather blasé manners. At the sight of Locke the latter mood vanished as if it had never been. They fell upon the southpaw as one man, slapping his back with a fond enthusiasm which fairly took his breath away.

It was the vanguard of the "regulars"—the men whose names were familiar household words the country over. It was small wonder that they carried themselves with a little air. The surprising thing was that they could fling that air aside, as they were doing now, to greet with hearty, genuine boyish delight the comrade they had not seen in months.

When the rougher preliminaries were over

tongues began to wag in chorus as Lefty was informed how the various men had passed the winter. Dirk Nelson, the steady, dependable, rather quiet backstop, had been, as usual, on his farm in Maryland.

"And don't you believe it wasn't hard to come away just when things were getting ready to sprouts," he concluded, with his slow, attractive smile. "Golly, if I'd saved up as much mazuma as old Herman Brosk, I'd sure quit the game!"

"Yes, you would!" exclaimed Rufe Hyland skeptically. Rufe looked after the Blue Stocking right field in summer, and spent his few leisure winter months in presiding as capably over a well-equipped gymnasium on Sixth Avenue. The gym was merely a diversion, however. With him baseball was the only thing worth while. "Yes, you would," he repeated—"for about one month! Then you'd be back hustling to sign on again."

"That's right," chimed in Kid Lewis, the peppery little shortstop. "It's a mighty fine thing after the post season to know you don't have to play ball for three solid months, but if you thought it was for good—suffering cats! Why, come February, when a fellow's blood begins to stir, I leave my little old two-by-four cigar store on Pennsylvania Avenue without even tellin' it good-by."

"Say, Kid," inquired Torrey, the change

catcher, curiously, "how's that business pay, anyhow? You must pull in quite a bunch of mazuma just because you're a Blue Stocking."

"Oh, I do pretty well," returned Lewis. "It ain't as if I was the real thing, like Lefty here"—he grinned, and ducked under the sweep of Locke's arm—"but there's plenty of decent fellows who are willing to buy their smokes even from an outfielder. Say, look what's coming! Whew! Some class to the old hoss, ain't there?"

The others turned to behold Laughing Larry Dalton, with his brown eyes and gay, careless smile. He was arrayed in a suit of amazing checks, sported a three-carat diamond in a startling scarf, and was preceded by a small darky staggering under the load of very new and very English-looking luggage.

"Solomon's glory!" gasped Hyland. "I thought I was some dressed, but— Say, old man, who wished it on you, anyhow?"

"Ain't he immense!" cried Lewis. "Pipe that chunk of alum weighing down his manly bosom! Can you beat it?"

"Jack's got a cub who's jest set his heart on your job, old horse," put in Nelson seriously, "and won't take no for an answer. How about it?"

"Hush!" said Lefty, with upraised hand. "You boys are pretty raw, talking like that to a real actor. Didn't you know little Larry's been

on the stage all winter? Talk about side—why, it sticks out all over him.”

Dalton was quite unaffected by the comments on his personal appearance. His smile widened as he shook hands with one after another of his teammates.

“Glad you like my get-up,” he drawled. “I thought these were some togs myself. Came pretty near starting a riot when I did my turn in it out at Salt Lake.”

“You were the handsome, curly-haired hero, I s’pose?” said Hyland.

“Nothing like that for me!” retorted Dalton. “I was the villain. Great dope, fellows! Before I quit the show I used to get sore as a crab if I wasn’t hissed enough.”

Lefty was highly amused by the mental picture of the laughing-eyed, happy-go-lucky chap doing the heavy villain. By this time the lobby was filled with curious recruits pausing on their way to showers, and newspaper men who quickly joined the circle. Kennedy appeared, and shook hands in his friendly fashion, exhorting them to have “plenty of pep this year.” The reporters stood about, laughing and joshing familiarly, and making mental notes for the daily wire home.

After dinner, while they were all gathered in the lobby, joking and discussing old times, two more arrivals blew in. Handsome Billy Orth

from his orange plantation in California, had picked up Joe Welsh, who owned a small cattle ranch in Arizona, and who affected rattlesnake-skin four-in-hands and hatbands.

"Back to the land of 'simmons and sore arms!" greeted Dalton. "By heck, Joe, you look kinky as the deuce! I'll bet you'll be down with a case of Charley horse inside a week. William, what do you think of this foxy shark—Locke here—sneaking down with the cubs and getting all limbered up ahead of us?"

Orth and Lewis joshed back. And so it went. There was a pleasant sense of friendliness about the whole affair which made Lefty regret the promise he and Stillman had given to keep an eye on Nels Savage.

He was not incommoded in the least by it. Savage did not leave the hotel, but spent the evening lolling about the lobby and playing pool with Pete Zacher. Locke and Stillman were puzzled enough to know what to make of such behavior, but when the third evening passed, and the fourth, and the fifth, without a single dereliction from duty on the part of the bush twirler, they began to believe that his last experience had taught him something. Then, to upset this theory, the reporter learned of several attempts that Savage had made to wheedle a drink out of one of the older men. He was just as disagreeable as he had

ever been, while his pitching, though it showed occasional brief spells of cleverness, continued to make old Jack shake his head and mutter.

"He ain't used the spitter once since he landed," the manager commented to Stillman one afternoon. Like more than one other baseball man, he did not hesitate to open his mind to this reporter, who had never once offended by sending the wrong thing to his paper. "Says he don't want to do it till he's warmed up. That may be so, or it may not, but I never yet see a spitball finger that wasn't trying it every little while."

Two days later Kennedy announced the first five-inning practice game to take place next morning at eight-thirty between the Regulars and the Yannigans, as the recruits were called. Since their arrival the former had been warming up with even greater leisure than the youngsters. From experience they knew well how an apparently trifling strain or twisted muscle at this crucial stage was likely to develop into something serious later on.

Even the prospect of the first game left them cool and unperturbed. On the other hand, the cubs, thrilled with the notion of showing off before Kennedy, hustled around, perfecting an elaborate system of signals and indulging in various other stunts which merely emphasized their "cubbishness."

CHAPTER XVII

THE TRY-OUT OF SAVAGE

IT might have been noticed, however, that none of the old squad was late in arriving at the grounds next morning. Kennedy had announced that Gene Temple would start pitching for the Regulars, while Savage, the new twirler from the West, was to step into the box for the Yannigans.

"I'm going to give him a fair show," the manager confided to Stillman. "He ain't showed anything much in practice, and if he don't put something on exhibition to-day I reckon we'll have to hitch the can to him."

In the camp of the Regulars knives were being sharpened for Savage's scalp with a vigor which had rarely before been shown toward a recruit.

"I don't seem to have taken to Jack's latest treasure," Dalton drawled as they were making ready for the game. "It would sort of please me to spill the beans for him to-day."

"Now, I should sorrow!" said Rufe Hyland. "If little Nelsie gets his it will break my heart."

"Gent seems to be awful popular," chuckled

Pink Dillon, of the pitching staff, who, arriving at camp late, had consequently seen little of the offending Savage.

"We all love him," said Laughing Larry. "Wait till you run up against him about once, and you'll be applying for membership in this knockers' club. Now, fellows," he added, as they trotted out into the diamond, "don't forget to put in a little extra ginger to-day and blanket this sweet-tempered affair from the sagebrush. Snow him under so deep he won't ever let another peep out of him."

This was the explanation of an exhibition of peppery vim on the part of the Regulars which astonished Jack Kennedy. Usually the older and more experienced players care little for the results of these early practice games, and frequently they lose for the simple reason that they think more of their arms and legs than of piling up a score against a lot of youngsters. Later, of course, as they begin to shape up, the Yannigans find it less and less easy to accomplish anything against them; but even then the cubs' downfall is generally due to some clever bit of headwork rather than to any great physical exertion on the part of their opponents.

The Regulars had the field. From the bench Lefty watched interestedly to see how Temple would act in his first appearance with big com-

pany. He had given the youngster a bit of advice as to taking things easy, and he was pleased to observe that he followed it.

Coombs, the first man up, got a hit and reached first. The second batter flied out to Douro, the center fielder, however; and Coombs, trying to steal second, discovered to his sorrow that the cub pitcher was far from being asleep. Two more stickmen faced Temple before a hot grounder toward Larry Dalton was whipped to first ahead of the runner.

"Now, fellows, remember!" urged Dalton as they trotted in from the field. "Let's get after our amiable friend there, and show him something."

The men were quite ready to obey his injunction. Batting is one of the greatest joys of a ball player's existence. Moreover, the attitude of Nelson Savage as he strolled into the box, lips curled sneeringly, his whole manner one of careless nonchalance, as if he considered the crowd scarcely worth pitching to, was extremely aggravating.

Rufe Hyland hustled to the plate, barely able to restrain his impatience to get after the man who irritated him so. He fell with violent delight on the very first ball pitched, smashing it on a line into the field to the right of center, and reached the initial sack with ease.

Kid Lewis, who followed him, bunted nicely, sacrificing the outfielder to second, and almost making first himself. Max Douro landed on the horsehide with apparent ease, sending it out between second and short.

"All off with him," chanted Dalton from the coaching line. "Got him going already! Everybody hits him! Now, Joe, get busy and send Rufe home."

Welsh advanced confidently to the pan, and Hyland danced away from third. It was up to Savage to display his wares now or never. With a curious gleam in his eyes, Lefty glanced at Kennedy, who stood near, chewing a cigar and scowling at the Western pitcher.

The southpaw murmured to himself, "I can hear the jangle of the tin can now."

But Welsh presently fouled out back of third, and the cub shortstop made a splendid one-handed stop of a red-hot liner smashed out by Ogan, by which the downfall of the pitcher on trial was apparently merely deferred for a brief time.

The second inning was practically a repetition of the first. In the first half a cub managed to reach third, where he languished and perished. When the sides changed the Regulars proceeded to the bat with that same zest and ardor, and in a brief space bases were filled with only one out.

From the bench Lefty was watching Savage

closely, and he could not help granting the fellow a little grudging admiration. In spite of his wretched, slip-shod work; in spite of the way he was being hit all over the lot, the man's attitude of insolent condescension had not altered. His lips still curled sneeringly; he continued to regard each batter with that same slow, heavy-lidded scrutiny which was like a slap in the face. As in the beginning, his manner gave one the impression that he was going through a childish performance which bored him to death.

"He's got nerve enough for two," muttered the southpaw.

Hyland came to the bat again. Seeking to duplicate his performance of the first inning, he hit the first ball over. It was an infield fly which the second baseman easily smothered.

"To much of a rush, Rufe," chided Dalton, who had been made temporary captain of the Regulars. "Take your time. Now, Kid, you know what to do. Tap it gently on the nose, and let's have a few tallies."

Continuing to watch Savage, it seemed to Lefty as if the man's delivery had grown slower and slower. He certainly took his time in winding up, and for a man getting such poor results it seemed almost ludicrous.

His first three balls to Lewis were wide, and the batter declined to reach for any of them.

"Why the mischief don't you try the spitter?" Locke wondered to himself. "Couldn't do worse with it than you've done already. It's supposed to be your one best bet."

Savage evidently had no intention of following the unspoken advice, for he made no motion of the ball to his mouth. Slowly winding up, he lobbed one over that cut the outside corner, and Lewis, playing the game, let it pass.

"Strike!" called Pink Dillon, who was acting as umpire.

"That's right, Kid," approved Dalton. "Make him put 'em over. Make 'em be good!"

Again that maddeningly long-drawn-out wind-up; again a curve which shaved the rubber by such a narrow margin that Dillon hesitated a second before calling: "Two!"

Lewis, who had seemed on the point of swinging and then changed his mind, glared at the umpire.

"Clean your lamps, Pink!" he advised sarcastically. "They need it bad."

"Never mind that, Kid," admonished Dalton. "You'll get him this time, all right. On your toes, boys! Run on the hit!"

Lewis scooped up a handful of dirt, rubbed it over his bat handle, and faced the pitcher with a firm squaring of his jaws. He looked as if he was ready to hit anything that came within a mile of the plate, and perhaps that was what made

Savage such a long time getting into action. His movements were so deliberate and snail-like that the base runners, dodging away from the sacks in readiness for the hit, grew impatient.

"Get a move on!" called Dick Nelson from second. "Somebody put a stick of dynamite under him!"

"Just so we finish the inning in a couple of hours!" delicately hinted another.

The comments made no impression whatever on the sneering man in the box. Slowly he drew up his right arm, and leisurely cuddled the ball under his chin, his eyes fixed scornfully on the face of Kid Lewis. There was a pause which seemed eternal; then, with a whiplike motion, the arm uncurled, sending the horsehide spinning squarely across the center of the pan.

"Batter out!" cried Dillon.

His voice reflected the surprise that filled every man on the field. Lewis had not wiggled his stick. At the plump of the ball and the sound of the umpire's voice, he gave a start and a gasp. Then, whirling, he stared down at the horsehide in the catcher's mitt as if he had taken leave of his senses. An instant later, his face flaming, he turned on Dillon.

"What sort of a game do you call this?" he demanded angrily. "That ain't the right ball! The guy out there never pitched at all!"

CHAPTER XVIII

THE VANISHING BALL

“**D**ON’T get sore and do the baby act,” Dillon admonished. “You’re out, and there’s no sense howling about it.”

“If you say so, I suppose it goes, Pink,” sneered Lewis; “but it’s a raw deal or a bum joke. You know the ball wasn’t pitched. This gink catching flashed another ball, and—”

“Be a sport, Kid, for the love of Mike!” interrupted Torrey, the catcher. He had taken off his mask, and was busy adjusting the strap. “Pulling off a string of guff like that don’t get you anywhere.”

Lewis glared at him, and swallowed hard. He seemed about to retort when Dalton sharply ordered him to cut it out.

“That’ll be about all for you, Kid,” he said. “Quit holding up the game. Now, Gene, old boy, just put a little something on the ball, and show these infants what they’re up against.”

Lefty could not help smiling a little as he saw Lewis slouch sourly out to his place in the infield,

scowling and kicking up the dirt for all the world like a child who has been scolded.

"Too bad for anybody to take these little games seriously," he remarked to Pete Grist, beside him.

The veteran of the pitching staff absently cuddled a stiff elbow, and nodded. "That's one of Kid's failings. He certainly is there with the alibis whenever he goes wrong at bat."

The unexpected rally on the part of their pitcher heartened the cubs to such a degree that they hammered out two runs in the first half of the third, and would have made more only for a bit of swift fielding on the part of Larry Dalton.

Taking their turn at bat, the Regulars managed to force one man across the rubber before they, too, were brought up sharply by clever work in the infield.

"Some kid—that playing third," remarked Grist approvingly. "What's his name?"

"Palsifer—Tap they call him," Locke explained. "He's from the Southern League. It wouldn't surprise me if Jack was thinking of him for Daly's place.

The old pitcher nodded understandingly. Third base was one of the positions everybody felt to be weak, and throughout the remainder of the game Grist kept an eye on this promising youngster.

In the fourth inning Temple slumped distinctly, letting the Yannigans hit him right and left. Had it not been for the admirable support given him by the Regulars, the cubs would have sewed the game up in a sack then and there. As it was, the score stood three to one in their favor, a rather surprising thing, considering the efforts which were being made by the older men.

Nels Savage, on the contrary, distinctly improved. Apparently he was making no greater effort than before, and the insolent indifference of his manner continued unabated. In spite of all this, there was no question of his better form. In the last half of the fourth he struck out two men, the first of whom was Lewis, who again started to raise a protest that the ball had not been pitched. He was promptly squelched by Dalton, who was also beginning to show signs of pettishness. As Lewis passed Lefty, scowling and angry, the southpaw hailed him.

“What sort of a game is that you’re trying to put over, Kid?” he bantered.

Lewis glared. “It ain’t a game! It’s gospel. Dillon called me out twice on a third strike when Savage hadn’t made a move to deliver the ball. They put up a job on me, that’s what they done. What in thunder’s the matter with Pink I don’t know, but—”

“Say,” interrupted Locke suddenly, “you

aren't really serious? You sure can't mean to say you didn't see that ball come over?"

"Didn't see it!" repeated Lewis angrily. "How could I see it when there wasn't any to see? I tell you, the gink didn't make a move to—"

"Don't talk nutty, Kid!" admonished Grist. "Lefty and I saw it as plain as you could see the ball he just pitched to Douro. What's the sense in talking like that?"

Lewis refused to argue further. He turned and departed, leaving Locke, at least, slightly puzzled by his manner. It seemed impossible that he could really mean what he said, yet there was a convincing touch of earnestness in the heat of his temper.

Lefty and Grist were still discussing the question when Kennedy's voice sounded behind them:

"Locke, get out there and pitch the last inning. They've got Temple sweating blood, and the rest of the staff are about the worst-bunged-up lot of cripples I ever saw."

The southpaw was glad of a chance to use his arm even for a single inning. He limbered up a bit, and by the time the last Regular had flied out to the cub center fielder he was quite ready.

Trusting mainly to his support, Lefty kept down the Yannigans' score. With the arrival of the final half of the inning Locke felt a sudden desire to put his batting skill to the test of Sav-

age's pitching. Of course, what Lewis contended was absolutely absurd, but it would be interesting to see what the fellow had.

As man after man stepped to the plate and left it either for the bench or in the direction of first, Lefty's interest in the proceedings became greater. In a vague way, he felt as if he were waiting for something unusual which was presently to take place, and even when another tally was scored that feeling continued unabated.

Two men were out, and there was a runner on second. Lefty had a feeling that the batter would be put out and the game ended without his going up. It was Larry Dalton's voice urging him to hustle, rather than the crack of leather meeting wood, which brought the realization that he had not guessed right. He snatched up a bat at random, and hurried to the plate.

Seen from this particular part of the diamond, Lefty decided that the sagebrush twirler's sneering countenance was more disagreeable than even he had supposed. The uptilt of the lips, the slow, insolent, heavy-lidded glance, the dragging, maddening deliberation of movement were all emphasized; and all combined to arouse deep irritation. Locke felt a sudden desire to plant a fist on those sneering lips. With difficulty he pulled himself together, realizing with a flush of chagrin that Savage had put a strike over

"Careful, old man!" cautioned Dalton. It was Lefty's carelessness and inattention which had made that first strike possible. He would see to it that there was no more of that. He stood waiting, tense and ready, his gaze fixed keenly on the narrow slits through which gleamed the Westerner's strange, baleful eyes.

Savage's movements were very slow. A ball was put over—another, and another still. To Locke the time consumed had been so everlasting that he wondered for a moment if it wasn't four, and why he did not hear the order to take his base.

The last delivery had been so wild that it was all Torrey could do to pull the ball down. The horsehide slipped from his grasp and rolled toward the rubber, where Locke bent and picked it up. He held it for a second in his hand before snapping it out to Savage with a force which was a wordless protest against the busher's unnecessary slowness; and, great as was his abstraction, he remembered noticing along one side of the sphere a streak which was half cut, half scratch, as if the leather had scraped against a sharp stone.

If this was the method followed by Savage in regular games, he would be hooted every time he appeared on the field. The fans like snap and ginger above all else in a player. No umpire

would permit it. That everlasting stare, too, was annoying. Lefty began to wish the busher would look in another direction, if only for a moment.

Presently he looked down himself to see whether he had inadvertently stepped too far forward. Before he glanced up again the ball, whizzing over, buried itself in the catcher's mitt; and Dillon's voice, full of a most unprofessional admonition, announced:

"Two—and three!"

Flushing, Lefty straightened his shoulders and tapped the rubber with his bat. What could have induced him to be so careless he did not know. He was quite sure, though, that it wouldn't occur again.

With eyes unwavering, he waited. Every movement of the pitcher's dragging wind-up was impressed vividly on his mind. In the midst of that movement Savage seemed to pause and remain set, poised and motionless. Lefty was contemplating demanding judgment on a balk, when the unmistakable plunk of something hard smashing against the catcher's mitt made him catch his breath and whirl round.

"Batter—out!" cried Dalton. Under his breath he growled scathingly: "Oh—you—big—bonehead!"

Lefty paid no attention to this uncomplimentary remark. In fact, it is doubtful if he heard

it. He was staring unbelievably at a soiled baseball lying in the hollow of Torrey's mitt—a ball which bore on the uppermost side a long streak—the ball which he had held in his hand a few minutes before!

CHAPTER XIX

A THING INCREDIBLE

IT was not strange that Lefty gasped and stared in utter amazement. The thing was uncanny—impossible! It made him feel for an instant as if something had happened to his brain—some twist or kink in the nerves of vision. In the flash of time before he got a grip on himself he felt vividly the staggering nature of such a thing happening at the crucial moment of a real game instead of a time like this, when nothing really mattered.

“Great Scott, Lefty,” came suddenly from Dalton, in a decidedly peevish voice, “you’re certainly a pippin, throwing away the game like that! Why didn’t you come out of your trance and baste that last one? It cut the pan in halves.”

Locke swung his bat carelessly in the direction of the pile, and turned to his chum, with a laugh.

“Sorry, old man,” he said. “That curve fooled me, that’s all.”

He made no effort to lower his voice, glancing coolly at Savage, who was coming in from the box. The pitcher’s eyes held a gleam of triumph

and derision, which brought a touch of color to Lefty's face, and roused in him a longing to get even with this fellow for the humiliation.

"Curve!" cried Dalton. "It was straight, and it didn't have anything on it but the cover."

The southpaw moved closer to his friend. His manner was casual and indifferent, but in his eyes was a look of earnestness which instantly caught the infielder's attention and held it.

"Nothing on it!" murmured Locke lightly. "Larry, if Savage could turn that trick at will, he'd be the greatest pitcher the world has ever seen."

He paused an instant and glanced around. Most of the players were heading toward the gate, for it was after eleven, and they were in a hurry for their shower, rubdown, and lunch. Dillon stood at a little distance, however, talking with Kennedy, while Kid Lewis was staring at the southpaw from near the bench. Catching his eye, Lefty waved him over.

"You don't understand what I mean, Larry," Lefty said, in a low tone. "Nobody could who hadn't been through the same thing. Don't ask any questions until I've talked with Kid; then I'll tell you all about it."

Without waiting for Dalton to speak, Lefty turned toward the approaching shortstop.

"Say, Kid," he asked lightly, "what's the mat-

ter with your eyes? How'd it happen you didn't swing when Savage whipped over a straight one twice for the third strike?"

The shortstop's eyes narrowed, and he scowled. "See here, Locke," he snapped, in the tone of one driven to the limit of irritability, "do I look weak in the garret? Anybody ever hint I was ready for the foolish foundry? There ain't nothing wrong with my eyes; they was examined by the best doctor in New York, and found O. K. Savage balked both times Dillon called me out. I saw him wind up and stop, glaring at me like he could chaw me up; he didn't pitch the ball either time. Torrey smacks his fist into his mitt, and then shows another ball. Then everybody tries to make me think I've been asleep. Fine work! Nice little joke! But I never thought Kennedy would stand in on anything so piffling and childish."

His jaws snapped shut over the last words like the slam of a door in a person's face; turning on his heel, he marched off across the field. As Grist had remarked that afternoon, the shortstop was prone to make excuses for poor stickwork and errors, but aside from that he was a decent, good-natured chap. Evidently the supposed trick, with its resulting banter, had worked him up to the point of exploding, Lefty's question being all that was needed to fire the fuse.

"What's it all about?" Dalton suddenly in-

quired. "Don't keep a fellow in suspenders. What's all this bunk about a game being put up on Kid? Is he crazy, or just sore?"

Lefty turned to his friend, his face serious. "It's simply this, Larry: Three times to-day—twice with Lewis, and once with me—Savage has pitched a ball the batter couldn't see."

"Couldn't see! You mean he sneaked it over?"

"Nothing of the sort. I mean, from the batter's point of view, the ball was invisible."

Dalton's jaw sagged, and he stared oddly at his friend. "You don't happen to be—in earnest, do you?" he asked, in a queer voice.

"Quite," Locke smiled faintly. "I know it sounds crazy, but it's a fact. Listen now, and I'll tell you."

When he had finished a brief, but comprehensive, account of the inexplicable incident Dalton's mouth and eyes were open to their widest extent.

"Queerest thing I ever heard tell of," he commented dazedly at last, running the fingers of one hand through his thick, curly hair. "I don't mean to doubt your word, old man, but—an invisible ball! Why, that's wilder than the worst nature fake ever doped out by a cub reporter. You haven't thought of any sane explanation of the thing, have you?"

Lefty hesitated, a slight flush creeping into his face. "I don't know whether you'd call it sane

or not," he answered slowly, feeling decidedly foolish and fully expecting his friend to burst into a roar of derisive laughter, "but it's the only one I can think of. Do you suppose he could have done it by—some sort of hypnotism?"

"Hypnotism!" exclaimed Dalton. "Why, look at the distance he was away from you! How the deuce could he pull off a stunt like that? They always have to look you square in the eyes and make a lot of motions with their hands, and all that."

"Not always. I don't know much about it except the little I've read, but it is claimed that sometimes Oriental magicians can hypnotize a whole crowd at once, and make them believe something is happening which isn't at all. Of course, Savage isn't an East Indian, but he's certainly got queer eyes that make you think he might do things like that."

"You've got me," Dalton admitted in a bewildered tone. "When you come to discussing East Indian wizards and their tricks, just count me out; I don't know anything about 'em."

He paused an instant, a smile struggling through the puzzled lines in his face. "If the same thing hadn't happened to two of you," he went on, his eyes twinkling, "I'd have laid it to a touch of biliousness. That puts a chap on the bum as quick as anything. As it is, though— Look here, Lefty,

Jack Stillman's got a head on his shoulders. He's heading this way now. You don't mind his knowing, do you?"

Locke shrugged his shoulders. "Oh, I suppose not," he returned slowly. "I'm not keen about having every one know the kind of trick that was put over on me."

To tell the truth, the southpaw was humiliated by the possibility that he had been hypnotized by such a character as Nelson Savage. It was only natural, of course. No man cares to admit that he can be, even for a moment, brought under the influence of another person. There is a general conviction, which is much more widespread than true, that such succumbing is proof of a weaker intellect. It was this feeling that brought to the southpaw a sense of shame—concealed under the guise of light indifference, but none the less poignant—and made him disposed to shrink from telling even so close a friend as the newspaper man.

CHAPTER XX

THE TRAP

STILLMAN was keenly interested. "By Jove!" he exclaimed when all the details had been told. "What dope for a story! A fellow'd have to make it humorous, though; it'd never go as a serious yarn."

"Do you suppose I was—hypnotized?" Lefty asked, in a disgusted tone.

"He's got a mighty queer look about the eyes—just the expression I've seen in people who were abnormal mentally," said the reporter, somewhat evasively it seemed. "Remember whether you looked him square in the eyes when you were up at the plate?"

"Don't remember especially, but it's likely I did."

"What we want to do is to make sure how he works this trick," suggested Stillman promptly. "It may be hypnotic influence, or accident, or just plain bluff. It's up to us to get him to repeat it, and find out."

"How are you going to do that?" Dalton inquired. "He's liable to be suspicious and foxy."

“Very likely, but we’ll have to work it just the same. Now, my suggestion is this: Keep the whole business under your hats, both of you. Pretend you haven’t noticed anything queer at all. Some time to-night Lefty can get in conversation with Larry, and talk about what a stick he was, letting such a bum pitcher hand him a strike-out. He should do this when Savage can hear him, and he must pretend not to know the man is listening. Larry can say that everybody’s rotten sometimes. Keep up that sort of thing to-morrow. Work it every chance you have to do it naturally, and I’ll bet by the time batting practice is called you’ll have him hooked and ready for the landing net.”

“And then, when he’s good and mad, you think he’ll try that strike-out stunt again?” said Locke.

Stillman nodded. “Isn’t it natural?” he queried. “If you work it right, and don’t overdo it, he’ll be in a state of temper that doesn’t stop to reason. If I can only get old Jack to make him pitch for batting practice we’ve as good as got him. There’s just one thing you want to remember: If you do get up against him, don’t keep staring at his eyes. Look at anything else about him you want to, but don’t give him a chance to work his little trick again, if that’s how he does it.”

Locke and Dalton proceeded to carry out the reporter’s suggestion to the best of their ability.

They maneuvered so well that by breakfast time Savage had been reduced to a state of cold fury without in the least realizing how completely he was falling into the trap.

Stillman attached himself to the person of the manager immediately on leaving the hotel that morning. The newspaper man had a way of inducing old Jack to do things, whenever he wished them done, by throwing out hints; and he now proceeded to throw in his best and most effective form.

That his efforts were not wasted was proven when Kennedy ordered Savage to the mound to pitch for batting practice some fifteen minutes after the field was reached.

"Every man run out his hit, and no loafing," said the Chief.

Watching Savage, the reporter saw him pass behind Locke and Dalton on his way to the mound, pause for a second irresolutely, with an angry snarl of the lips and swift clenching of his fists, and then move on again. A moment later Kennedy touched the scribe on the arm.

"Step out here with me, Stillman," the manager said. "I want to give you the chance you were anxious for to watch Savage work at short range."

"I'll be there like a passenger train." The newspaper man's tone was enthusiastic. "Just

one second till I get my camera. I left it over on the bench."

Sprinting over, he snatched up the camera and turned back. Halfway he encountered Locke, and slowed down.

"Get in as soon as you can," he whispered. "Don't forget about his eyes; string him along a little."

Without waiting for a reply, he loped out upon the diamond, and took his place beside Kennedy, who was acting as umpire. It did not take Stillman long to discover that Savage had lost some of the cool, insolent indifference of the day before. It was evident that he strove to affect the pose, but every now and then, in movements or gestures, there escaped a hint of the real nature beneath the shell of make-believe—a hot intolerance, made worse by the rasping his temper had undergone at the hands of Locke and Dalton.

The reporter studied him with an interest quite unfeigned, hoping the while that Lefty would not too long delay his appearance at the plate. If signs meant anything, the busher was ripe for the experiment. It needed little or nothing to send him off. Seeing Lefty standing ready to succeed Hyland at the rubber, Stillman suddenly resolved to give a last effective push.

"Well, Locke's up," he remarked, in a low tone,

as Hyland clouted the ball and began to lumber heavily around the base lines.

"He wasn't very strong with the willow yesterday," reminded Kennedy.

The reporter laughed. "That was an accident. There isn't one of the old guard, let alone a cub, who can keep Lefty Locke from hitting the ball somewhere into the diamond when he wants to."

He spoke just loud enough for Savage to hear, and was rewarded by a stiffening of the busher's whole frame. From that moment Stillman was oblivious to everything about him save the drama which had for its limited stage the narrow stretch between the pitcher's mound and the plate.

He saw that the southpaw was following his injunction not to look at Savage's eyes. He guessed, too, from the latter's attitude, no less than from the sudden slackening of his movements, that the pitcher was trying to force Lefty into doing the thing he had been warned against.

To Stillman the affair had suddenly become infinitely more absorbing than he had expected. It seemed to have developed all at once into a tremendous struggle between two wills. His glance flashed from Lefty's face to the back of the fellow in front of him. The thick, muscular neck, the very pose of the head, sunk low upon those powerful shoulders, and inclined slightly forward,

combined inexplicably to give the reporter a strange feeling that perhaps in Savage dwelt an evil spirit which grew stronger with every victory, as vampires are said to increase in power and malignity with each new victim.

Common sense told him that it was absurd. This was the twentieth century, with evil spirits and magicians relegated to the dim and distant past. But, though he tried his best to thrust the silly notion from his mind, he found himself wishing for the power to throw his influence on Lefty's side of the balance.

Savage's first delivery was wide; it seemed to Stillman as if the fellow had purposely made it so. The second was also a ball. When the third missed a corner of the pan by at least six inches the reporter decided that the man on the mound was following a regular system which he held to on such occasions as this. He noticed also that the pitcher's movements became slower and slower with each delivery. As far as Stillman could tell, his eyes never left the batter's face.

When at last Savage completed his tedious wind-up, and pitched, the newspaper man fairly held his breath, though in reality he was quite sure what Lefty would do. The ball was a fair drop, with considerable speed. Locke missed it by several inches.

"A bluff, of course," Stillman muttered to him-

self. "He's playing his part of the game to force Savage to the limit."

And yet, as he waited for that interminable wind-up to end, the reporter was not quite so confident. What if Lefty should forget instructions and let the busher get in his fine work, after all? It would be more than humiliating—it would be disastrous. A man who could break up such a cool character as Lefty Locke would be dangerous even on his own team—a menace on any other.

Glancing anxiously at the southpaw, Stillman was just in time to see his friend's eyes shift in a sudden peculiar manner. The movement had in it every appearance of intense effort, and was accompanied by a queer, dazed shaking of the head. Before he could recover himself, apparently, the ball whizzed over the center of the pan.

"Strike!" called Kennedy; and, in a lower tone, to Stillman: "Anybody who can fan Lefty Locke twice running is going to bother the rest of the crowd, believe me!"

"Wait!" retorted Stillman. "He hasn't fanned—yet."

It was far from easy to assume that air of confidence. Lefty had evidently, through carelessness or bravado, disobeyed orders. His eyes were fixed, and there was something decidedly mechanical in the way he swung his bat gently back and forth.

Stillman frowned. That odd sense of an evil influence radiating from the man before him returned with added strength and conviction. He found himself at one moment mentally raging at the fellow's slowness; at another he feared Savage would pitch too soon. His eyes never left the southpaw's face, and the longer he stared the more certain he became that his friend was again under Savage's control.

Suddenly the busher's arm shot forward. Stillman caught his breath in a sharp intake. The progress of the ball seemed as slow and dragging as a defective motion-picture reel running at quarter speed. Apparently Lefty had not moved a muscle. He stood with that same staring, vacant expression on his face, as if utterly oblivious for the moment to everything that was happening about him. Stillman groaned aloud; then—

There was a ringing crack as Lefty swung at precisely the right moment to meet the sphere when it floated over the center of the pan. Out into the field to the right of deep center soared the horsehide.

CHAPTER XXI

THE LAST STRAW

STILLMAN recovered from his surprise just in time to observe the brief, fierce spasm of rage which seized Savage. He had partly turned, and stood, hands clenched and muscles tense, staring at Locke, running down the base line. There was stamped on the rough-hewn profile a look of mingled astonishment and bitter hate which made even the hardened newspaper man feel a little tingle along his spine.

For a fraction of a minute the baffled pitcher stood motionless. Then, with machinelike precision, he wheeled full around, deftly caught the ball lined in by one of the youthful volunteer fielders, and faced the next batter without having uttered a word.

“By Jove!” murmured the reporter under his breath. “He’s sure got it in for Lefty.”

Stillman cut away from Kennedy as soon as he could after batting practice was over, and made for the spot where Lefty was preparing to limber up his arm over by the stand.

"You certainly need a good tanning, you big bluff!" he said as he came up.

The southpaw grinned. "Pretty good, wasn't I?"

"Too good! You had me all up in the air, thinking it was real."

"You don't mean to tell me that glassy-eye stuff took you in when you knew what was doing?"

"We didn't rehearse that part," explained the reporter, "so I wasn't expecting it. Besides, it would be just like your crazy ways to chance doing what I told you not to, just to see what would happen."

Locke's smile widened and took on a touch of chagrin. "That's just what I did do—and, say, that gentleman has got some hypnotic eye, believe me! He was working it overtime to-day, too. If I hadn't looked away when I did there'd been nothing doing for mine."

"Then I did guess right? He was trying to work it again to-day?"

"Trying his best. Say, did you see his face when he discovered how I'd been stringing him along? Some temper there, eh?"

"You bet!" The reporter's tone was emphatic. "You want to keep an eye on him, old man. I don't believe he's got a scruple to his name."

"Don't worry," put in Locke. "He's had a thrashing coming for some time, and I'm willing

to be the one to hand it to him. Well, now we've found out about this, what are we going to do?"

This seemingly simple question proved difficult to answer. In setting the little trap for Savage, the two friends had been animated altogether by a desire for personal information. They had sought to know what it was that enabled the busher to perform those almost uncanny feats. And now, having found out, they were rather at a loss as to what to do with their information.

Satisfied though they might be regarding the nature of the man's remarkable power, they were unwilling to place themselves open to the ridicule and disbelief with which ninety-nine persons out of a hundred would greet such a story.

After dinner, Lefty, Stillman, and Larry Dalton retired to a corner of the lobby to discuss this question. Their arguments were warm and lengthy, and for the better part of the evening they remained oblivious to much of what was going on about them. They finally decided to hold off any action until the power on other players of this surprising talent of the bush pitcher had been tested further. Then Kennedy appeared before them, his face far from amiable.

"Any idea where that sweet-scented geranium, Savage, has taken himself?" he inquired.

"Might be playing pool," Dalton suggested. "I saw him go in there with Ogan after dinner."

Kennedy shook his head. "He ain't. Charley, the marker, says he finished his game and came out over an hour ago."

"Want us to take a look around for him?" inquired Lefty, with no great show of enthusiasm. A glance at the clock had shown him the hour hand close to eleven, and the discovery seemed to bring on a sudden yearning for bed.

"No!" was the almost snappy retort. "The common scruff's off tanking up again, I reckon. If he is"—the lean jaws tightened, and the dark eyes snapped ominously—"it's going to be the last time. You boys better hit the straw. Look at the hour."

He turned on his heel and walked away, apparently heedless of whether his advice was taken or not. Tramping upstairs, he turned into the room next his own, and walked straight over to one of the windows looking out on the side of the hotel. His exploring fingers encountered a stout cord hanging limply over the sill.

"The cheap, low-down tank!" he growled. "This is the end of him. I've coddled him along all I'm going to. I don't give a hang whether I'm shy on working pitchers or not. I'll tie the can on him to-morrow, an' if every decent manager I know don't hear the jangle of it I'll certainly be some surprised."

CHAPTER XXII

SAVAGE'S DISAPPEARANCE

WITH his mind finally made up to a step he had really wanted to take for days past, Jack Kennedy arose with extreme promptitude next morning, and dressed briskly. Having made his toilet, he stepped into the hall and knocked loudly on the door next his own. There was no response, but this did not surprise the manager.

"Sleeping it off, I reckon," he muttered as he turned the knob and entered without ceremony. "Well, it'll be the last time he--"

There was an abrupt pause, followed by a grunt of surprise, as the manager stopped in the middle of the room and stared about him. Except for himself, the place was empty. The bed was smooth and untouched. Even the string still hung limply over the window sill. Evidently Savage had not returned at all.

"Out all night!" exclaimed the manager. "Or has he gone for good?"

Frowning, he walked over to the window and glowered into space for a minute or two. It was

a shock and a disappointment to have the fellow sneak off this way without giving the manager a chance to let loose some of the verbal vitriol that had been corked up in him for so long.

"He can't be gone for good," Jack said aloud, "with all his stuff lying around like this. He'll be back, and then—"

The pause was more eloquent than words. The manager turned to leave the room, when suddenly the door was thrown violently open, and Al Ogan burst in.

"You common scrub!" he exclaimed furiously. "Where's my— O-h!" His jaw sagged, and he stared amazedly at Kennedy. "I thought you were Savage. Where is he?"

Old Jack shook his head. "Give it up. I was asking myself that question not half a minute ago. What seems to be your trouble?"

"Trouble!" Ogan snapped out the word in a tone of extreme anger. "The cheap skate stole my watch!"

"What!" Kennedy's voice was sharply incredulous. "You can't mean that, Ogan. Savage has certainly got brains enough not to pull off a stunt of that sort."

"Has he? Well, he don't use 'em, then! The watch was swiped last night in the billiard room, and he's the only one who could have taken it."

"What makes you so sure of that?"

"It's as plain as print. We were playing pool right after dinner—the only ones in the room. My coat and vest were in a chair back of the table. When Savage asked for a match I told him to help himself from the box in my side coat pocket. I was making a hard shot at the time, and my back was turned. When I came to look for the watch this morning, it was gone."

Kennedy frowned. "How was it you didn't notice the loss last night?" he inquired, with some tartness. "You don't know but somebody went through your clothes while you were asleep."

"And left a roll of bills in my trousers pocket?" countered Ogan sarcastically. "I guess nit! Generally I take my watch out and leave it on the bureau, but last night we were late, and I just dumped the clothes on the chair and tumbled in. Since Lefty bunked with Dalton, I've had the room to myself, and I have a habit of locking the door. There's no getting around it, Jack, Savage is a thief, and I'm hanged if I let him walk off with something I think as much of as I do that watch. Haven't you any idea where he's gone?"

A sudden spasm of disgust assailed Kennedy, making him wish fervently that he had never set eyes on the aggravating individual who had disturbed his equanimity more than any recruit he had ever handled.

"Not a ghost of one," he answered. "I'm done

with him. He can be in the infernal regions for all I care, just so he stays away from me."

He strode past Ogan to the door; there, pausing abruptly, as if ashamed of his outburst, he glanced back over his shoulder.

"Go see Locke," he advised gruffly. "He thinks he's got a hunch where Savage gets his booze. I'll let him off this morning to take you there if he wants to. But don't mention that man's name to me again."

He stamped out into the hall.

"Old man's temper is certainly riz up," Al commented. "Wonder what else this crook has been doing to put himself in bad?"

He wasted little time on that question, however. Descending to the dining room, he bolted his breakfast, and sought out Lefty Locke.

"Sure, I'll go!" the latter agreed, when he had listened to Ogan's recital. "Can't promise to help you much, but I'll do my best. Jack Stillman and I have only the vaguest sort of an idea that he gets his booze at a certain farmhouse across the river; we really don't know a thing for sure. I'll be right with you."

Knowing that the reporter would be busy with his daily column for the *Star*, Lefty made no attempt to hunt him up. Securing his hat, he joined Ogan at the door, and together they started briskly for the river road.

They had scarcely fallen into step before there flashed suddenly into the southpaw's mind a remembrance of that perplexing night of over a week before and the problem of the voice in the dark which he had never really solved. It was rather curious that these latest developments should again couple Savage and Al Ogan together. Locke wondered whether it might not be something more than mere coincidence. He became swiftly determined to find out, if finding out lay within his power.

"It's funny, Al," he remarked in a rather careless tone, "but I had an idea you and Savage knew each other pretty well."

CHAPTER XXIII

THE CATASTROPHE

O GAN turned and stared at Lefty with an air of questioning which was either real or remarkably well assumed. "Know Savage well?" he said. "What gave you that notion?"

The pitcher shrugged his shoulders. "Reckon it must have been that night a week or so ago when you came into the hotel with him about ten. You certainly acted mighty chummy then."

"Chummy!" was the puzzled exclamation. "Why, I've never— Oh—that night, you mean? I remember now." He hesitated an instant, and glanced suddenly away with an affectation of carelessness which did not deceive his companion. "I reckon that must have been the first time I ever spoke to the man," he went on. "I ran into him by accident, not a block away from the hotel."

Lefty's eyebrows went up. "And yet," he drawled, "you'd left that poker game and hustled out over an hour before."

"I went for a walk," Ogan explained hastily, without looking at the southpaw. "I— Say,

what the deuce is this, anyhow—an inquisition?” The color flamed into his face, and he flung back his head to stare resentfully at Locke. “You talk as if you thought I wasn’t telling the truth. You—look that way, too.”

“Hardly that.” The pitcher’s tone continued lightly casual. “I did have an idea, though, that you weren’t telling me everything. You see, Al, it wasn’t just idle curiosity that made me ask.”

For a second or two longer Ogan’s resentful expression remained unchanged. Then his eyes softened a little; his lids drooped.

“Sort of crabby, wasn’t I?” he inquired. “Guilty conscience always does make a fellow sore. You see, I was ashamed to tell anybody about that note of Tap—”

“Tap!” put in Lefty, in astonishment. “Did Tap Palsifer send you that note?”

“Sure! Who’d you think did? Tap knew about the trouble I had last season, but he didn’t want to come right in and break up the game, so he found a boy to take in a note he’d written to—”

“You’ve got me, Al,” interrupted Lefty, with a shake of the head. “Reckon I’ve been barking up the wrong tree. I don’t understand a single word you’ve said. Don’t go ahead if it’s something you’d rather not tell me.”

“It isn’t—now I’ve made the break,” the in-

fielder returned, after the briefest of pauses. "I'd like you to know, and then you can give me a hand in case I tumble another time. It's cards, generally. I can't seem to use 'em in moderation. Last year I played so much it put me to the bad on the diamond, and I had to cut it out altogether. I had no business to sit in the game the other night, but I thought it might be different this year. Tap was wiser than I, though. The old hankering was there worse than ever. I had the time of my life pulling out, but I managed to somehow; and when I got outside didn't he give me a roasting—and then some! Well, we went for a stroll and, on the way back, ran into Savage. Tap stopped to get some cigarettes; Savage and I came on together. He wasn't half bad that night. I didn't know then what he was."

Lefty drew a long breath, and smiled. It was impossible to doubt the truth of Ogan's explanation. The man's eyes were clear and candid; his gaze unwavering. So it was Temple, after all, that he had overheard—Temple, the seemingly open, wholly attractive youngster Locke himself had been the means of bringing into the Blue Stocking squad.

His interest in the puzzle reawakened surprisingly by this discovery, Lefty promised himself a speedy interview with the young Seaboard recruit, and made haste to apologize to Ogan for the man-

ner in which he had bungled. Fortunately the infielder took it all in good part, and the southpaw forestalled any awkward questions by branching off into an account of the little Stillman and himself had learned of Savage's mysterious trips across the river. By the time he had finished, the boathouse was in sight.

Pausing only long enough to see that the boat was gone, Locke led the way upstream to where Stillman's worm-eaten old flat-bottomed scow had been hidden in the bushes.

"Though why he was so careful about it I don't know," Lefty commented as they hauled it out and shoved it into the water. "I can't imagine anybody taking it as a gift, much less stealing it."

Placing Ogan in the stern, Locke took the oars, and headed for a slight cove in the farther bank, which looked at that distance like the mouth of a small creek or inlet.

The river was wide, and from the shore it had a sluggish appearance, which Lefty soon discovered to be deceptive. He had not progressed a dozen yards before he felt the strong tug of the current, and presently it was all he could do to keep the bow from being turned downstream.

"Better let me take an oar," Ogan suggested. "You don't want to strain your arm."

"Don't worry about me," returned the southpaw. "Keep an eye peeled for logs coming

downstream. These spring freshets always flood out a lot of 'em, and they're hard to see in this muddy water."

The infielder nodded, and at once directed his gaze upstream.

There was a pause in midstream to let a water-soaked, low-floating log shoot past, while two minutes later the oarsman had to pull furiously to escape being struck amidships by another. There was a lot more, both of hard work and excitement, in the little jaunt than he had anticipated. It would be aggravating if nothing came of it.

At last, after what seemed an eternity of strenuous labor, the strength of that midstream current began to lessen. Locke bent to his oars, sending the boat through the water at comparatively good speed. It seemed to him that not more than a few seconds could have passed before he saw Ogan raise himself suddenly in the stern.

"Hard on your right—quick!" he shouted. "There's a snag—"

The words died on his lips as he dropped back on the seat, clutching instinctively at the sides. The southpaw put forth every ounce of strength he possessed in a strenuous attempt to pull the boat around. Before the clumsy scow had even begun to respond to his efforts, there was a thud, a crash; the boat rose up as on the crest of a wave, quivered, then dipped sidewise, coming to rest at

a weird angle. And there it hung precariously, its strained, rotting frame shaking and trembling continuously with the force of the strong current rushing against the exposed bottom.

With the sudden shock of collision Lefty had lost an oar. Now, bracing himself with one foot against the lower side of the boat, and stretching a helping hand to his companion, he carelessly relinquished the other, which was carried away by the water.

Ogan lost not an instant in pulling himself up beside Locke. He was drenched to the waist, for the stern seat had been thrust under water when a knotty spur of the snag tore a hole in the rotten planking just back of the bow. For a minute they clung to the frail, shaking timber in silence, staring across the hundred feet or so of troubled, muddy water between them and the shore. Then the southpaw suddenly burst into a laugh.

"Jove!" he cried. "If Savage could see us now, he'd say the joke was on us."

The infielder's responsive chuckle was prompt, but seemed somewhat lacking in spontaneity.

"I'm glad he isn't around!" he returned. "Say, old man, how the mischief are we going to get out of this? The old tub's likely to break up any minute."

"That's no lie!" Locke had relinquished his hold on the seat, and was tugging at the laces of his

dripping shoes. "There's nothing else but to lighten cargo a bit and swim for it."

"That's the bad part of it," Ogan spoke slowly, in the tone of one who is striving hard to suppress every hint of emotion. "I—can't swim."

The southpaw's nimble fingers abruptly ceased picking at the sodden laces; his head came up with a jerk. His gaze rested for a second lightly on his friend's face, then flashed past the baseman's broad shoulder to linger appraisingly on the sweep of smoothly sliding brown water that had suddenly widened so miraculously. In his expression there was no hint of the momentary contraction of the throat muscles, or the brief anxious chill which lingered for a second on his spine as he realized the meaning of that terse announcement. When he spoke, his voice was level and untroubled.

"That so?" he queried coolly, breaking one of the laces with a snap, and dragging off a shoe. "I'll have to swim for two, then, won't I? Don't lose any time shedding your coat and shoes, old fellow. They're a nuisance in the water."

Ogan proceeded to obey instructions as quickly as he could. His face was, perhaps, a shade less brown, but his lips were firm, and there was not even a tremor in the fingers that did their work without fumbling. His own feelings gave Lefty a good idea of what must lie beneath that mask of

nonchalance. The fellow was grit clear through, he thought admiringly, as he slipped out of his coat and let the garment drop carelessly into the stream.

“Grab hold of me to steady yourself,” he advised quietly when Ogan began to wriggle out of coat and vest. “Loosen up your shirt, too. I reckon that’s about all you’ll have time to do.”

The southpaw’s own thin silk shirt was open at the throat. Under his stockinged feet he felt the planks bend and quiver like that absurd moving floor in one of Coney Island’s side shows. The wreck could scarcely hold together many minutes longer, yet he waited with cool patience until the infelder was quite ready.

“There!” he said at last as the striped vest was whirled out of sight by the current. “Now, listen. We’ll slide over this side together, and do it as easy as we can. When we’re in the water you don’t want to worry. Lie perfectly still, with one hand on my shoulder, and let me do the rest. You can catch hold of my shirt, but don’t lose your head and grab me around the neck. Get me?”

“Sure!” Ogan’s lips were pressed tightly together, a straight gray line. His eyes were wide, almost purple, but unwavering. “But if I should be a fool, you—hand me one.”

Locke smiled briefly, reassuringly. “You’re not going to be a fool. Come ahead now. Take it

easy. We don't want the old tub to split up—Hold up a second! I'll be hanged—”

With a splintering crash, the great bulk of a submerged log, swept down by the rushing current, struck the wrecked boat squarely. Flung violently against the one remaining oarlock, Lefty caught a momentary glimpse of Ogan's body hurled past him into the brown torrent. The planks under his feet seemed to melt away like ice in boiling oil. In another instant the muddy water met over his head, blotting out everything.

CHAPTER XXIV

DIRE PERIL

WITH the instinct of a skilled swimmer, Lefty had drawn in a deep lungful of air before he went under. It was that same instinct which, on rising to the surface, made him thrust vigorously with arms and legs toward the place where he had last seen Ogan. He was not in the least troubled about himself. A moderately good swimmer, keeping his head, would have no difficulty in reaching shore; and Lefty was more than that. But the infielder probably would thrash about and struggle fiercely, only to hasten the inevitable.

As his head shot up into the sunlight the south-paw brushed a straggling lock of hair from his eyes, and stared eagerly downstream. Not a dozen feet away the muddy water was suddenly cleft by a clutching hand, followed swiftly by the distorted face of Al Ogan, eyes staring, mouth gasping widely for precious air.

With a powerful lunge, Lefty flung himself forward. A few strokes brought him beside the

struggling man just in time to slide a firm hand under his chin.

"Steady, Al!" he cried. "Take it easy, old man. You're all right now."

He scarcely expected to be obeyed, and he was not. Ogan was in the grip of that paroxysm of madness which comes to every drowning person. He knew only that out of the awful, despairing waste of instability had come something solid, something which kept his mouth for a moment above the loathsome, lapping, suffocating water. His impulse was to grasp it, and grasp it he did with a surprising swiftness which caught Lefty, looking though he was for such a move, off his guard.

Remembrance of the few succeeding minutes was never very clear to Locke. The instant Ogan's fingers closed over his wrist in the iron grip of despair he knew his work was cut out for him. He recalled jerking away with all his strength, and of going under in the process. When he finally came to the surface with lungs fairly bursting, Ogan was nowhere to be seen. Pausing only long enough to draw a deep breath, the southpaw dived.

In diving he had nothing whatever to guide him, and it was sheer luck that brought his outstretched hands against the body of the man he sought. This time there seemed no movement. Ogan had evidently lapsed into unconsciousness, and, catching

him under the shoulders with one arm, Lefty struck out for the surface.

He was beginning to grow exhausted from so much struggling. He was assailed by grave doubts of his ability to get Ogan ashore. Then, to his horror, just as they shot up into the blessed air, the limp infielder turned unexpectedly in his arms, and fastened clutching fingers about his throat.

The southpaw tore away the gripping hands, and took an uncertain stroke or two out of reach. Almost as quickly he was back again. His head reeled dizzily, and he could scarcely see, but to let his friend sink was a thing impossible. Reaching out, he caught Ogan by the hair. Then a sobbing breath of thankfulness passed his lips as he saw a strange boat that was almost upon them.

It came swiftly on the current, threatening to run down the two struggling in the water. Then it swerved, its progress was stayed perceptibly, and a figure suddenly bent over the side, with arms outstretched. Lefty was too much occupied with the now almost senseless Ogan to glance at the stranger's face. He held the infielder up in the water until a pair of strong hands slid under the limp arms and began to drag the dripping body into the boat. Then the pitcher reached for the moving craft himself, caught the side near the

stern, and clung there, too weak to pull himself into the boat unaided.

A moment later a shadow blotted the sun from Lefty's eyes. Glancing up, he found himself staring into the face of Nelson Savage.

For a moment the southpaw had a weird feeling that he was seeing visions. That the busher should be here was natural enough, but to find him doing what this man had done seemed incredible. Then, as the fellow dropped to his knees on the stern seat and reached out a helping hand, Locke realized that the impossible was happening.

"Give us your fist," the Westerner said briefly.

There was a straining of muscles in which Locke rendered what help he could, and a moment later the pitcher was in the boat, staring dazedly and still a little incredulously at the face of his rescuer.

"All right?" the latter questioned, stepping back to secure one of the oars which was balanced precariously over the side.

Savage's heavy brows met in a single straight line above the bridge of his rather large nose, and there was an undercurrent of suppressed anxiety in his voice, and an inflection which faintly stirred a chord of memory in the southpaw's mind.

"Sure!" Lefty answered mechanically, his eyes

still searching the other's face. "Only a little winded, that's all."

A second later he forgot everything else in the remembrance of Ogan's condition. The infielder sprawled in the bottom of the boat, his eyes closed. Without a word, Savage and Locke straightened him as best they could, and began to work his arms vigorously. To their intense relief, he responded almost at once; he was not unconscious, but utterly exhausted. As soon as he realized this, Locke suggested that they make for shore at once.

Savage agreed, and, each taking an oar, they headed for the bank from which Lefty and Ogan had started, without trying to pull back to the boathouse.

It was a curious, silent row. Neither man spoke, for, in truth, they needed all their wind for the physical exertion of cutting across the current. But all the time Lefty's mind was busy trying to figure out the subtle, but unmistakable, change which had come over the chap beside him. He could not imagine the Savage of yesterday and the day before acting as this man had done. He might, perhaps, have come to the rescue of two drowning men, but certainly he would never have shown any anxiety for their welfare once they had been dragged from the water. There were other things, too, slight, but equally puzzling; but

it was not until they had reached the bank and lifted the still helpless Ogan from the boat that the remembrance he had been striving for came to Lefty in a flash.

That unpleasant, baleful glare had vanished from Savage's eyes. They were human now, almost attractive and winning—the eyes of the man he had met and unaccountably liked at the station in that little, far-away Jersey village of Belle View.

CHAPTER XXV

TWO IN ONE

THE realization had scarcely flashed into Locke's mind when Ogan, who had dropped weakly down against a sapling, slowly lifted his head from his lax arms, and stared fixedly at Savage. His expression was dazed, as one just awakening from a dream to realities which he could not understand. Then swiftly the puckered, puzzled wrinkles in his forehead changed to deep, vertical furrows.

"You!" he said sharply; then: "Well, where's my watch?"

Savage's eyes widened a trifle. "Your watch!" he repeated. "I don't remember seeing it."

The infielder made an impatient gesture with his hands. "Don't try that game!" he snapped. "You saw it well enough last night in the billiard room. What's more, you managed to slip it from my pocket into yours."

Even though Ogan was probably still too dazed to realize what he was doing, the bad taste of entering into a discussion of the robbery at such a moment brought a flush of embarrassment to

Lefty's face. His lips were parted in a swift impulse to silence his teammate, when a glance at Savage stilled the words abruptly.

The busher had straightened almost imperceptibly; his face took on the keen wariness of one suddenly on his guard. It was gone in a second, leaving only the faintest added touch of color and a slight lowering of the lids; but it was enough to reduce Locke to wondering silence.

"You've made a mistake," Savage returned, with chill brevity. "I know nothing whatever about any property of yours."

"You don't!" sneered Ogan. He rose unsteadily to his feet, and faced the quiet, square-jawed man before him. "I s'pose you'll be saying next that you weren't shooting pool with me last night?"

Savage's lids drooped even lower. His hands were clenched so tightly that the knuckles showed white against the brown skin. He had not stirred, but to Locke he suddenly gave the impression of tremendous dynamic force, quiescent, but likely at any moment to leap forth in strenuous action.

"Because I played pool with you," the Westerner returned, in that same cold, deliberately restrained tone, "it hardly follows that I am responsible for the disappearance of your valuables. I happen to own a very good watch already, and really have no use for two."

"I didn't suppose you'd wear it!" retorted Ogan hotly. "Such things are easy enough to dispose of, as you probably—"

"Al," interrupted Lefty indignantly, "cut it out! Can't you understand that but for Savage we'd both of us, probably, be at the bottom of the river? He's the one who pulled us out."

The infielder's jaw sagged, and for a time he stared at his friend, a crimson tide surging into his face. His gaze shifted to the busher. His lips quivered a little and parted, as if he meant to speak, but closed again as he turned his back and moved uncertainly toward the near-by roadway.

"You mustn't mind, Savage," Locke said, in a low tone. "He's been worrying a lot about losing a watch his father gave him, and he really isn't himself at all. Suppose we go on back to the hotel? I'm beginning to feel as if some dry clothes would be acceptable."

The other pitcher nodded, and they started after Ogan. At first there was a rather awkward pause, but, overtaking the infielder, his very silence seemed to throw the other two together, and before they knew it they were conversing on various topics relating to the training camp and the forthcoming baseball season.

Lefty was talking with a purpose. An idea had come into his mind—a strange, fantastic, almost

uncanny idea, which, if he could find any reason for it, would explain a good many of Nelson Savage's apparently inexplicable traits. By the time they reached the hotel he had accepted his solution of the problem, weird as it might seem. Ogan hurried on ahead of them, apparently eager to escape from an embarrassing situation. He was passing the desk when Major Holcombe, the proprietor, halted him.

"Mistah Ogan," said the major, in his slow, courtly, Southern manner, "one moment if yo' please, suh." He came forward from behind the desk, one hand extended. "I think this is yoah property. It seems to be marked with yoah initials. I regret most sincerely the unfawtunate situation, suh, but I have discov'ed a man in my employ—the boy Charlie, who has taken cha'ge of the billiard room—guilty of theft, suh, and this was found on his pusson."

For a long moment Ogan stared at the watch which had been laid in his mechanically outstretched hand. Then he raised his eyes to Savage's. In them there was contrition, embarrassment, and regret. It was not easy to speak. He moistened his lips, and at last the words came haltingly:

"I beg your pardon, Savage. I seem to have made a big—mistake. I hope you'll forgive me."

There was no hesitation in the busher's acknowledgment of the apology. He took the other's outstretched hand promptly.

"Don't worry about that, Al," he said quickly. "We're all of us likely to go wrong now and then. Forget it!"

Mumbling something indistinguishable, Ogan hurried toward the stairs, and disappeared, leaving the other two to follow more slowly. In the second-floor corridor Lefty paused an instant beside Savage's door.

"Well, I'll go on and get into something dry," he said. "See you later, old chap."

Savage nodded and entered his room. The southpaw continued on down the hall alone. While dressing Lefty turned over and over in his mind the curious idea that had come to him. It was almost absurd, yet what other explanation could make apparent impossibilities dovetail so accurately? Starting downstairs, he found that it was almost noon, and was not surprised to encounter Jack Kennedy in the lobby below.

"Well," queried the manager briefly, "did you find the man you went after?"

Hesitating, Locke glanced swiftly around. The players were appearing by twos and threes at the main entrance. He drew Kennedy across the room, pausing beside the door of the stuffy little writing room.

"We did," he returned quietly. "And, Jack, I want you to do something for me."

The manager stared, then frowned. "Look here, Lefty," he exploded, "don't tell me you want a favor for that sneak!"

"But I do. Wait! Just let me tell you what he's done for me."

Briefly, but with vivid clearness, he told what had transpired on the river that morning. Kennedy remained unmoved.

"Very nice!" he conceded. "But where do I come off—holding on to a creature who gets skated every time he can beg, borrow, or steal drink? I'm not running the Blue Stockings for my health, you know. I've got to show results. I've got to make every man count, and how am I going to do that if I keep no-goods like this Savage? Why, son, he isn't worth his board. Not only has he tiddled ever since he struck camp, and sassed me till I'm ready to mash his homely mug in, but he's got the kind of disposition that would set a whole team scrapping—and you know what that means."

Locke reached forward impulsively and laid a restraining hand on Kennedy's arm. "Listen to me, Jack," he said quickly. "I want to ask you something. Did you ever read a book called 'Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde'?"

The manager's eyebrows went up, and he

sniffed. "About that fool who took powders and changed himself into a bum?" he inquired.

"Well, that's the way the story has it, but Stevenson didn't mean it quite so literally. What he had in mind was a case of dual personality. You know that every one of us has good impulses and bad. In some people these impulses are strengthened to personalities which are constantly at war. Sometimes the good nature is uppermost, sometimes the bad. It's a constant fight for control of the body, and the one that is strongest ultimately wins out."

His eyes were very bright; his whole face indicated his earnestness. "That's Savage's case," he went on emphatically. "I'm positive of it. I've told you what sort he was when I first met him that day on the train. When I ran into him at Belle View, he was utterly different; he was human and civilized. He'd lost that beastly look about the eyes; the better nature was uppermost. Down here he had changed again; the other self held control, and you know what that was. It got my goat. I didn't know what to make of it. But to-day when I found him changed again I remembered the story. I remembered a play I saw last winter which had that very subject for its plot, and which was founded on fact. There have been such cases—a number of them—and I'll bet you any money, Jack, that Savage's is one of them."

In spite of the talk and laughter of a group over by the desk, that corner of the room seemed very still. Kennedy, incredulous and skeptical, leaned against the back of a worn leather chair.

"And you believe all that?" he asked at length.

"I certainly do," was the emphatic response.

"Where do I come off if I keep this man? What's there in it from a business point of view?"

"A good deal, I think," Locke rejoined. "You've complained that Savage has never made good on the diamond. Well, you've only had a chance to judge from the poorer side of him. How do you know what he'll do in his present condition? It's like trying out a totally different man. He may develop into a pippin."

"And then do this lightning-change business just when I need him most?" the manager growled pessimistically. "Hanged if I want to monkey with a chameleon like that, son. I've got too many troubles running a crowd of normal, ordinary ball players to bother with freaks who change themselves every little while."

"But won't you give him a chance, Jack?" pleaded Lefty. "If you won't do it for him, or for the good it may bring to the organization, do it for me. I haven't asked you for many favors, have I?"

There was another pause. Then Kennedy's homely face expanded in that rare smile which

transformed it utterly. "Have it your own way, Kid," he muttered. "You mostly do when you really set out to get something. We'll give this changeling of yours another try-out, only remember this: If he falls down you won't have a leg left to stand on. There goes the gong."

He turned toward the dining room, and Lefty followed him. Even before they had crossed the lobby there came the scraping of a chair in the little space misnamed the writing room, and Nelson Savage moved slowly into the doorway. His face was set, and rather pale. The pupils of his eyes were dilated, and his expression was a curious mixture of pain, gratitude, and infinite regret.

CHAPTER XXVI

METAMORPHOSIS

FOR a minute or two Savage stood staring across the lobby after Locke and the manager. Then, as they disappeared into the dining room, he drew a long breath and raised one hand to his forehead with a puzzled, undecided gesture.

"*Jekyll and Hyde!*" he muttered in an odd voice as he turned back to the writing room. Beside the spotted, baise-covered table he paused again, looking down with thoughtful, unseeing eyes at the unfinished letter lying there.

"So that's it," he murmured under his breath. "I wonder?"

He frowned, and began tapping lightly on the table with one finger. His lids drooped, and his whole face was eloquent of troubled indecision. It was several minutes before he roused himself with a determined shake of the shoulders, and sat down.

"What a splendid friend that chap would make!" he said in a low tone, his somber face brightening momentarily. "He'd stick to a fel-

low through thick and thin, once he believed in him. I wish— Oh, thunder! What's the odds, anyhow!"

He drew the letter to him, and picked up a pen. Five minutes later he had sealed the envelope and dropped it into a side pocket; and when he presently entered the dining room no one could have guessed from his expression that he had so lately been stirred to the very depths of his being.

As he hesitated just inside the doorway, glancing from right to left, Locke, who had been watching for his appearance, hailed him from a near-by table.

"Better sit down here, Savage," he said pleasantly. "There's an extra place or two."

He had maneuvered so that one of those vacant chairs should be next his own, for his theories as to the bushier's eccentricities had made him anxious to see as much as possible of the fellow, and study him at close range. Several of the other players looked surprised at this unwonted cordiality toward a man few of them had any use for. Larry Dalton's eyebrows went up comically as he glanced inquiringly toward his friend, but he made no audible comment. He rather suspected some elaborate joke, but, like the others, was content to wait until he got his bearings before joining in.

Savage showed neither hesitation nor embar-

rassment. He took possession of the chair beside the southpaw as if it were the most natural thing in the world, gave his order to the waiter, and settled back, his smiling eyes, so different in expression from the eyes his comrades had known, ranging composedly from one to another of the surprised faces.

Before the meal was over Lefty had observed enough to strengthen his belief in the accuracy of that odd supposition concerning dual personality. The Westerner's two natures were opposite as the poles. The snappy, grouchy, quarrelsome Savage who had become so unpopular with his companions and such a thorn in the manager's side, had nothing in common with the pleasant, well-mannered, somewhat retiring chap sitting at Locke's right. And Lefty was not the only one to notice the change. He could read in the faces of the others, and in the way they cast furtive glances at the busher, that they were equally astonished, and quite unable to know what to make of it all.

"What's the game, old man?" Dalton whispered, as they walked out into the lobby afterward. "What in thunder have you done to him? You must have done something. The mucker's almost human!"

Lefty shook his head. "You've got me," he returned briefly. "I haven't done a thing. He's been this way ever since he pulled Al and me out

of the river this morning. Maybe he's decided to turn over a new leaf."

"Huh!" grunted the infielder skeptically. "It's more likely he's putting up a game."

Locke made no comment on the suggestion. His eyes were fixed upon Savage, who stood a short distance away, talking with two or three players. His mind was busy with a new detail of the extremely interesting problem the man presented.

Was the fellow aware in his present state of what had been said and done by his other self? During dinner he had not talked a great deal, preferring apparently the rôle of listener. He had answered questions freely, however, and now and then volunteered a comment. To the ordinary observer there had been nothing at all out of the way in his manner, or in those brief remarks, but Lefty recalled now a certain keen attentiveness to what was being said which reminded him oddly of a deaf man feeling his way. There had also been one or two little inconsistencies of speech that seemed significant.

Still watching and thinking, Locke presently saw Pete Zacher stroll up and join the group. A moment or two later the recruit's harsh voice was raised in a note of surprise:

"Say, Nels, what in time have you done with your ring?"

Savage stared at him for a flash, then glanced swiftly down at his left hand.

"That's so," he said. "Much obliged for reminding me. Reckon I must have left it in my room when I was washing up."

"In your room?" repeated Zacher. "I thought you said you never took it off."

The Westerner hesitated for a second, then shrugged his shoulders lightly. "Did I say that?" he queried carelessly. "You mustn't take everything so literally. Very likely I didn't want to take it off at that particular time."

Zacher's lips curled. "I don't know what you meant; I only know what you said." He laughed disagreeably. "I s'pose there's hockshops, even in this little one-horse burg, eh?"

The recruit's expression scarcely changed, but to Lefty's observing eyes his smile had taken on a chilling quality.

"Very likely," he retorted quietly, turning on his heel. "You ought to know, if any one does. Going out to the park, Lefty?"

The southpaw nodded, and together they moved toward the door. In a breath Savage had committed two palpable inconsistencies. He had flatly contradicted a former utterance about the ring, while his manner showed undisguised dislike for a man with whom he had previously been on better terms than with any one in the squad.

It was scarcely possible that he would have done this with a full consciousness of that other personality.

Lefty had read of one or two such instances, but to come face to face with such a condition was vastly different. It seemed incredible—uncanny. He tried to picture the mental turmoil of a man awakening suddenly to an existence which had been snipped off as abruptly, perhaps, months before. The fellow must, by this time, have some notion of the state of affairs. He must realize that something almost like another soul inhabited his body at intervals. But to have absolutely no knowledge of what that other soul had been making his body do or say would be intolerable.

The busher's performance on the field that afternoon won a grudging nod or two of approval from doubting Jack Kennedy. There was nothing especially brilliant about his form, but Savage unquestionably showed an anxiety to do his best which had hitherto been conspicuously lacking.

"He might make a pitcher if he kept that up," admitted the manager to Lefty. "Of course he won't, though. About the time I begin thinking I can use him, he'll get hitting it up again, or have one o' them fits you tell about."

Though Locke waved away the possibility with some assurance, he was secretly troubled by that

very fear. With no data to guide him, he had not the least notion of how often these lapses occurred or what brought them about. The previous period had lasted over two weeks, at least; but, for all he knew, the present one might terminate at any moment. He cudgeled his brains to think of anything he could do to ward off such a catastrophe, but there seemed to be nothing save an effort to keep the bushier's mind occupied and prevent him from brooding over his condition.

With this idea in mind, Lefty deliberately started in to make things as agreeable as he could for Savage, and before very long he discovered the task to be far from irksome. As in that brief railroad trip they had taken together in the North, he found the Westerner very winning and likable; and Savage left no doubt of that liking being returned. The end of the second day found them good friends indeed, and, curiously enough, none of Lefty's older cronies—Stillman, Dalton, Ogan, and the rest—showed any signs of disapproval at the intimacy.

Said Laughing Larry: "When a guy who's been as rotten as he has can turn himself into a first-rate, decent chap, it would be a crime not to encourage him."

Truly the metamorphosis had been complete. But would it last? That was the question which troubled the southpaw, and was scarcely ever ab-

sent from his mind. He had a feeling that the hateful transformation might come at any moment, and without the slightest warning. He could never be really sure in parting from Savage, even for an hour, that their next meeting would not find the busher's evil self again in control.

CHAPTER XXVII

ENTER: A GIRL

“**G**OING to do anything special to-night, Lefty?” asked Savage, as Locke hastily averted the searching glance of inquiry which he had come intuitively to cast on the Westerner almost every time they met.

“Not a thing,” returned the southpaw promptly. “Got something on your mind?”

The busher hesitated an instant, oddly embarrassed; and for the first time that evening Lefty noticed that his companion was dressed with unusual care.

“I wonder if you’d mind—making a call with me?” Savage faltered. “Would it bore you?”

“I’ll be glad to go,” said Lefty readily. “Want to start right away?”

The Westerner nodded and turned toward the door. Pausing a moment at the desk to mail a letter he had just written, Locke joined him, and they left the hotel together. For a space they walked along in silence under the thick, spreading branches which met and intertwined above the

roadway. Then Savage turned suddenly toward his companion.

"There's a—friend of mine stopping here with her aunt," he said, with an effort at casualness which was not at all deceptive. "She's heard a lot about you, and she asked me to bring you around some evening." He hesitated perceptibly; in the bright light from one of the moving-picture theaters his face seemed rather flushed. "You've done a lot for me, old man, and been a mighty good friend," he went on impulsively. "I'd like to have you meet her."

A thrill of keen interest, mingled with relief, surged over Lefty. In a flash he realized that the Westerner's manner could mean but one thing: There was a woman in the case. A woman, provided the busher had a deep enough interest in her, was likely to prove a strong influence for good in his present condition. Moreover, her presence in Tulane explained the recruit's absence from the hotel on the previous evening—a circumstance which had worried Locke not a little.

"I'd be glad to meet her, Nels," he said simply, "and I certainly appreciate your compliment in wanting me to. That's all rot, though, about my having done anything for you. If there's any indebtedness between us, it's on my side."

It was so dark under the trees that neither man could see the other's face. Lefty was conscious,

however, of his friend turning swiftly toward him with a quick-drawn breath.

"Do you think I don't know?" the busher asked almost sharply. "I'm not much of a talker, but some day I may have a chance to do something; and, believe me—"

His teeth came together with a click, cutting off the words abruptly, and leaving the southpaw devoured with curiosity. Just what did Savage mean? Was he referring merely to Locke's marked friendliness, or had he something more vital in mind? Did he really know much of the behavior of his other self, or was it merely guess-work?

Had there been time Lefty would have managed to frame some sort of an indirect question, but just as he was thinking out a way of pursuing the subject, his companion pushed through a gate and led the way up a brick walk to the wide portico and spreading façade of a typical Southern house.

The door was opened by a negro butler, who took their hats and ushered them into a room at the right of the wide hall. It was an attractive apartment furnished with admirable taste in old mahogany and rosewood, but the southpaw had no time to observe details. A fire flickered on the hearth, and, standing before it, her back to the door, was a slender girl, a glimpse of whom made

Lefty's heart bound and sent the color flaming to his very temples.

"Janet!" he gasped, in a low, dazed tone. "Why—"

He broke off abruptly with a stifled gasp of disappointment as the girl turned, revealing the charming, piquant face and smiling gray eyes of a stranger.

"I'm delighted to meet you, Mr. Locke," she said, with an attractive Southern accent, as Savage presented his friend. "My aunt, Mrs. Randolph."

Lefty stammered out his acknowledgments rather haltingly. When the white-haired, Dresden-china old lady had resumed her chair by the center table, his gaze returned to Miss Celia Berkeley.

"Didn't I hear you say something as you came in, Mr. Locke?" she asked demurely, but with laughter lurking in her eyes. "It sounded like—a name. I might almost venture to say a girl's name."

Lefty smiled. "It was," he acknowledged. "As you stood before the fire you looked so like a girl I know up North that it gave me quite a shock."

Even now, with the lamplight full on her face, he could still see that odd, tantalizing resemblance to the girl who meant more to him than

any one else in the world. Her height was nearly the same as Janet Harting's, and it seemed that they had been cast in the same dainty mold. The way she carried her head was like Janet's manner, too, and while her hair was a shade darker than the Northern girl's, it curled and waved above her perfect ears and at her temples in that fascinating manner with which the southpaw was so familiar.

"Really?" exclaimed Miss Berkeley interestedly. "Do you mean to say I have a double somewhere?"

"Hardly that. It's more a superficial resemblance of height and hair and that sort of thing than any real likeness."

The girl dimpled, and her eyes gleamed mischievously. "That means she's heaps more attractive, doesn't it?"

Lefty flushed a little. "I didn't say so," he protested.

"You didn't have to," she countered. "I have a trick of reading people's minds, sometimes, and I'm quite sure she's lovely. You must tell me all about her."

The southpaw did not need much urging. He had not laid eyes on Janet in over a month, and he hungered for a sight of her. There had been no letter, even, for the better part of a week. He had written lengthily that very night, asking if

there was anything the matter, and he wished now that he had wired. Naturally, he painted a glowing picture of Miss Harting's charms, which would have made that young person blush, and which caused the girl sitting opposite him to give a long sigh, the dimple still dancing in her cheek.

"If I even make you think of such an attractive creature, I am desperately flattered," she said. "I have a feeling that I'd like this Janet of yours immensely, so you must bring us together when I go North this summer. You'll promise, won't you?"

Of course Lefty did. He meant to keep that promise, too, for he felt that she and Janet would get along famously together. Miss Berkeley seemed quite as fond of baseball as Janet, though Locke discovered, when the conversation presently turned on that subject, that she lacked a good deal of Janet's technical knowledge of the game; and they were both attached to baseball players. If that didn't make them friends, the southpaw decided, nothing would.

The evening was quite the pleasantest Lefty had passed since training season began. The three young people chatted on all sorts of subjects while Mrs. Randolph, though mainly occupied with her knitting, added a remark now and then which showed that she was following the conversation. There was nothing in the least stiff or

formal about the call; on the contrary, it passed off with an atmosphere of friendliness which made Locke feel as if he had known the ladies for a long time. When the two ball players left, shortly before ten, it was with the promise to return for dinner the following evening.

They were halfway back to the hotel before a sudden qualm made Lefty break off abruptly in the midst of a most enthusiastic tribute to Miss Berkeley's qualities.

"By George, Nels!" he exclaimed. "I hadn't any business to accept that invitation to dinner."

"Why not? Got a date?"

"N-o, but I'll be butting in and spoiling another evening for you. She seemed really to want me to come, and it never occurred to me until this minute that it was probably her Southern hospitality that made her do it."

Savage laughed softly. "Don't you go worrying about that. She asked you, didn't she? Well, that's enough. She wouldn't have done it unless she wanted you. I can't imagine why, of course,"—his voice held a tone of mischievous teasing,—“but I know Celia. If your attention wasn't already occupied elsewhere, I'd probably be steering you off. As it is, I'm mighty glad you get on so well together.”

There was no mistaking his earnestness, and,

though still entertaining some slight misgivings, Locke let the matter drop.

Returning from the field next afternoon, he was buttonholed by Kennedy, who kept him talking for nearly an hour. This still left him plenty of time to dress, but he lost track of Savage. On descending finally to the lobby, he found at the desk a note from the other man saying that Miss Berkeley had asked him to come around early, while Locke was to follow as soon as he was ready.

"Glad they'll have a few minutes alone, anyhow," the southpaw said to himself as he walked briskly down Main Street. "I'll be hanged if I can understand why she wants to drag in a third party. I'm sure I wouldn't."

As he walked he fell to wondering—not for the first time that day—whether Celia Berkeley was aware of Savage's peculiar mental shifts. It seemed scarcely possible, considering her light-hearted gayety, and yet it would be a thing most difficult of concealment in such an intimate friendship. Perhaps she did know, and was bravely concealing the fact in an effort to keep the man she cared for from slipping back to that other hateful self. The possibility made Lefty long more than ever to help in the affair. He was wondering whether he might dare to broach the subject some day to Miss Berkeley alone, when he reached the gate of the Randolph place, and,

glancing up, saw the slender girl coming toward him.

She was dressed in some white, clinging stuff which made her seem slenderer than ever. She wore a wide, drooping garden hat which partly concealed her face. In the shadowy half light her amazing likeness to Janet struck on Lefty's senses with a fresh thrill. "If only it could be Janet!" he thought, as the gate clicked behind him.

"Good evening, Miss Berkeley," he said, in a voice which he kept steady only by an effort. "I hope I'm not too early."

With a swift, indescribable motion, the girl flung back her head, and stretched out both hands impulsively in a manner which sent the blood drumming in Locke's temples, and made him leap forward with a stifled cry of astonishment and joy.

She was not Celia Berkeley, but Janet Harting!

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE BETTER MAN DOMINANT

“**A**ND so you really think Janet and I will like each other?” inquired Miss Berkeley, her eyes sparkling mischievously above the bowl of flowers in the center of the candle-lit table.

The southpaw’s answering laugh was clear and mirthful, without even a suspicion of pique. With Janet sitting beside him there was no room in his mind for anything but pure, unadulterated delight.

“Oh, I’m the only original goat, all right,” he admitted cheerfully. “You two certainly played the game to the queen’s taste.” He glanced sideways at Janet. “I’ve never even heard you mention Miss Berkeley’s name, to say nothing about being friends.”

The girl dimpled charmingly. “I didn’t. I only met her the last time I was staying in New York. We got on famously, though, and when she asked me to visit her we both thought it would be great fun to surprise you.”

“You sure did it!” Lefty chuckled. “You’d make a clever actress, Miss Berkeley. I did

wonder a bit why, with one pitcher already attached, you'd want another butting in."

"In other words, you thought me a dreadful flirt," said the girl. "Well, now it's all over, I warn you to make the best use of your time. Janet and I are here for only three days."

Locke's face fell. "Three days! Why, I thought you'd surely be here until we break up."

"There's no reason in the world why you shouldn't, Celia," put in Mrs. Randolph from her end of the table. "You know I should love to have you and Miss Harting stay as long as you please."

Miss Berkeley shook her shapely head. "I'm sure you would, Aunt Julia, but it's quite impossible. I've simply got to get back to look after dad and the boys. It was all I could do to persuade them to let me off for this one week. Of course," she added, with a glance at the man opposite her, "it isn't as if we were going a thousand miles from here. Savannah's not more than eighty, is it? I know we make it in about four hours."

"Hum!" murmured Lefty. "I suppose a fellow might get off for a Sunday if we worked Jack right." He looked at Savage. "Reckon we'll have to make the most of these three days, old man, but they're going to seem awfully short."

It was long after ten when the two men departed, but both commented on the brevity of their stay. In the morning, too, it required something of an effort for Lefty to concentrate his mind on the work of training. But he was not the sort to waste time in vain regrets.

Savage worked hard, and made such a good showing that about the middle of the morning Kennedy took him in hand and began coaching him personally. Lefty had noticed the manager hovering about the Westerner, watching him in a surreptitious sort of way, and he was not surprised when old Jack suddenly abandoned his skeptical attitude.

For the remainder of the morning and all afternoon the lanky baseball veteran kept at it, hammer and tongs, criticizing almost everything Savage did, and only varying the monotony by an occasional rare grunt of approval. It seemed as if he were doing his best to discourage the man or drive him to an outburst of anger, and Locke watched his friend with some anxiety as to the outcome. Knowing the old manager better, probably, than any one else in the squad, he realized that this seeming onslaught was in the nature of a compliment. Kennedy never wasted time on the hopelessly incompetent. If a recruit showed little or no promise he mentally checked him off as deadwood, and got rid of him at the earliest

possible moment. He would never have kept Savage as long as this but for the necessity of having some one to relieve his old twirlers in pitching to the other players, and latterly on account of Lefty's warm personal interest in the man. It was evident now that he had altered his opinion, and if the Westerner could only realize this and continue his good work under the grilling fire of criticism, he stood a chance to make good.

His performance surpassed even Locke's hopes. Not once did he lose his head or his temper, though several times it seemed as if the latter was badly strained. Without comment he followed Kennedy's directions, pitching the same ball over and over again until he had succeeded in pleasing his critic. There was no trace of sullenness or boredom in his manner. He seemed to be giving the best that was in him, honestly striving to improve his form. He made no objection when the spitball was suggested, and his ability at that erratic sort of delivery was so marked as to surprise the manager into a burst of approval.

"You get a good break on that spitter," he said. "That's the sort of stuff I've been trying to get out of you for two weeks."

To Locke, on their way back from the park, he was even more enthusiastic:

"The boy's got the makings of a twirler in him. You saw his spitball? Reminded you of Ed

Walsh, didn't it? He'll improve before we start North, and if he only don't go an' slump—"

"I don't know why he should," Lefty said reassuringly. "He's got every possible inducement for keeping up the pace."

He had a feeling that it was not a matter of volition with Savage. But, knowing Kennedy's skepticism regarding the matter of dual personality, he refrained from voicing it.

"Well, I hope he does," old Jack said briefly. "Young Temple's doing fair, but that's about all." He chewed on his cigar for a moment, then went on meditatively: "I've half a notion to put Savage in the box when we play that Atlanta team next week. They're a tough bunch, from what I hear, and if he could make a showing against 'em, I'd begin to think I'd found a pitcher."

CHAPTER XXIX

THE ETERNAL FEMININE

WITH proverbial Southern hospitality, Mrs. Randolph insisted that the two ball players dine at her house on each of the three evenings before the departure of her niece and Miss Harting for Savannah. On the last of these evenings they were asked to come early enough for afternoon tea, which was served on a flagged terrace overlooking an attractive, old-fashioned garden laid out on the slope leading down to the river. It was a charming spot.

When the teacups were emptied and Mrs. Randolph had retired for her customary rest before dinner, Celia Berkeley lost no time in suggesting that Janet take the southpaw for a little stroll.

"I know he's curious to see what a real Southern garden looks like," she remarked, her gray eyes dancing. "Nelson doesn't care much for flowers, so we'll wait for you here."

Lefty embraced the suggestion with enthusiasm, and without further delay they passed through the belt of shrubbery to one of the winding, box-bordered paths; a wilderness of flowers on either

hand, before them the glinting river with a distant line of blue hills, beyond which the sun was dropping.

It was the first time they had been really alone, and there were quantities of things to say, none of which would have been of the slightest interest to a third person. Besides, back in Lefty's mind was a half-formed notion of confiding to Janet his perplexities regarding Nelson Savage—perplexities which had been increased not a little that day by a change he had noticed in the busher's manner.

It was nothing he would have paid much attention to under ordinary conditions. Savage had been noticeably thoughtful and preoccupied ever since breakfast, as if there were something on his mind. But nowadays the southpaw was fearful of the slightest alteration in his friend's demeanor, and he had a positive longing to talk the matter over with a sympathetic, interested confidant.

At length they reached the end of the garden and paused, momentarily silent, beside an ancient stile which gave access through a moss-grown stone wall to the peach orchard and, beyond, the river. The sun had dipped out of sight behind the hazy, purple hills, leaving the sky a riot of orange and flaunting crimson. The sloping orchard before them was a sea of delicate pink. At their feet, sheltered by the wall, and creeping over it in places, a wild tangle of yellow jasmine

sprawled untrammelled, perfuming the air afar with its heavy fragrance. It seemed to Lefty as if such a spot must necessarily beget confidences, and in a moment his mind was made up.

"Nels Savage is a good sort," he began tentatively.

"Isn't he!" agreed Janet. "I liked him the minute I saw him."

"It's certainly lucky, then, that you didn't see him a week ago," Locke said emphatically. "He wasn't the same man at all."

Janet bent suddenly and plucked a sprig of jasmine. Usually devoted to flowers, she seemed bent now on stripping the stem clean of its star-like yellow blossoms.

"Not the same?" she repeated slowly, her eyes bent on the unconscious work of destruction. "What do you mean?"

"Just what I say. You wouldn't have known him. He was grouchy and ill-tempered. The whole crowd hated him like poison. I couldn't stand him myself, and you know how thick we are now. When I think of what an unmitigated ruffian he was—"

"But, Phil!" The girl's head came up suddenly; her eyes were wide—protesting. "You don't understand. He wasn't— He had to—"

She broke off with a quick little gasp of dismay, and clapped one hand to her lips. For a second

she stood silent, the color creeping into her face, her startled gaze fixed intently on Lefty's narrowed, questioning eyes.

"Well?" queried the southpaw at length. "What did he have to do? Aren't you going to finish?"

Janet dropped her hand and glanced down through the long vista of straight, slender trunks with their crowns of blossoms.

"I don't know that there is anything more to say," she answered slowly. "I suppose I was thinking how impossible it was for a man like Mr. Savage to—act as you say he did, unless—unless—he was obliged to. Don't you think we'd better start back? It must be almost time for dinner."

Lefty ignored the last remark. His face was serious—almost stern. His eyes were fixed intently on Janet's profile. The perfume from the jasmine seemed suddenly to have become almost sickening in its cloying sweetness.

"Unless he was obliged to!" he repeated in an odd tone. "Can you suggest, Janet, any possible reason which would necessitate a fellow like Savage turning himself voluntarily into a beast?"

"But I know so little of him," she protested. "How can I tell—how can any one tell—what motives govern some one who is almost a stranger? Don't be absurd, Phil, and make a mountain out

of a molehill. Mr. Savage is nothing to me except that he's practically engaged to Celia, and I like him."

Lefty did not speak for a moment. Then he shrugged his shoulders slightly, and turned toward the house.

"It is getting rather late," he said quietly. "Perhaps, as you say, we'd better go in."

His voice was colder than he realized. It was merely the man's instinct to hide from a woman the fact that she had hurt him. That Janet knew something was perfectly evident. What it could be he had not the slightest idea, save that it had to do with the problem he had been trying his best to solve. He had no wish to force her confidence, but the fact that she was unwilling to give it freely stung him to the quick.

The girl herself started slightly at his tone, and turned a little pale. Then her chin went up in that old, familiar movement, and without a word she fell into step beside him, walking back to the house in silence.

The evening was not exactly a lively one. Lefty did his best to forget the incident and behave as if nothing unpleasant had happened. He honestly wanted to ignore it, but always at the back of his mind was the consciousness that Janet was keeping something from him. It was her own secret to keep or reveal as she chose; he admitted

that. It might amount to nothing in the end; though, knowing the girl as he did, such a possibility was doubtful. But it had to do with another man, and there is no suitor alive, though he may have absolute faith in the woman he cares for, who can behold with equanimity that woman mixing up in the intimate affairs of even his best friend, if it be to his own exclusion.

Janet was, by turns, dull and superficially brilliant. At nine she pleaded a bad headache and wished to retire, thus breaking up the party prematurely. The girls were leaving at an hour which made it impossible for Lefty or Savage to see them off, so the good-bys had to be said that night. They left Locke enraged at himself, provoked at Janet, and soured with the world generally. He had a feeling that he was a brute who had spoiled what would otherwise have been three days to look back upon with unalloyed pleasure. He even blamed Savage because his interest in the busher had prompted him to ask that unfortunate question; and on reaching the hotel he hunted up a paper and took refuge behind its open sheets, mainly to avoid mingling with one of the several groups scattered about the lobby.

He did not escape; one of the groups joined him. He had scarcely settled down before Jack Stillman, Dalton, and Al Ogan invaded the ancient

leather-covered sofa. The irrepressible Larry gently removed the newspaper and sat on it.

"What the deuce do you want with the world's happenings?" he inquired airily. "Within a month we'll be making history ourselves. Listen, till I tell you some real news. Did you know there was going to be a genuine, old-fashioned horse race over at the county seat next Saturday?"

"No; is there?" was the indifferent reply.

"There is. Wouldn't you like to take it in?"

Lefty shrugged his shoulders. "I can't say I'm pining away with any such desire."

Dalton sighed and cast up his eyes. "Gee! You're about as lively to-night as a wooden Indian. I thought you'd be all for it. Anybody who's got a passably good nag around here will enter, and they say there's an Englishman come on from the West with a couple of fast ones. It ought to be more fun than a badger pull."

Locke drew himself up in the corner of the sofa, and surveyed the volatile infielder. "Have you figured out how you're going to get off to see this jamboree?" he inquired briefly.

"Well, you know what a store Jack sets by you, old man," Dalton said ingratiatingly. "We thought if you asked him—"

"Nothing doing!" put in Lefty decisively. "I'm not going to lay myself out for a panning.

By next Saturday the old man will probably have games scheduled for every other day or so, and you've got just about as much chance of getting off for the afternoon as a snowball has down below. If you're so keen about it, ask him yourself."

All of which goes to show how completely a misunderstanding with a girl could sour even as good-tempered a man as Lefty Locke. Later, in his room, he realized that he had been rather short, and regretted it; but by that time he had begun to consider Janet's abruptly terminated remark in detail and ponder over it.

She had intimated that Savage had been obliged to act the part of an ill-mannered rowdy in the early part of the training season. Whether she knew what she was talking about was, of course, a question; but if it was true, Lefty's hypothesis of dual personality was knocked into a cocked hat. But how could it be true? How could any man deliberately work the transformation which had occurred in Savage's case? How could any normal human being, of his own volition, be sane and decent and likable one day; a coarse, evil-eyed rowdy the next? Above all, supposing such a thing were possible, why should he do it?

CHAPTER XXX

THE ATLANTA TIGERS

THE days which followed were so full that Lefty had little time in which to trouble over the coolness of Janet. As the end of the training season loomed in sight, Kennedy worked his squad harder and harder. The mornings were devoted to all sorts of intricacies having to do with "inside" baseball. Each afternoon saw a hotly contested game between the Regulars and Yannigans, now lengthened to full nine innings. There were long runs to and from the park, bathing, massaging; and the result of it all was that the men slowly but surely shaped into the pink of condition. Those who had been overweight found themselves getting back to normal, while the few who needed it gained the coveted pounds under this wholesome, healthy routine.

The men, one and all, ran faster, batted harder, and threw with more confidence and accuracy. The members of the pitching staff had worked out that first inevitable soreness, and were beginning to put on steam. Best of all was the growing sense of efficiency—the delight in doing without

effort something which had, a short time before, been so laborious.

There was one feature of this period which was not so pleasant to the thoughtfully inclined. Scarcely a day passed that did not see the squad diminished by one or more members. It is not so bad when a recruit departs. He is young, and life lies before him; another chance will come if he is worth his salt. But the case of an old-timer who has failed to stay with fast company is rather tragic. He has outlived his usefulness. It is the beginning of the end. He will go swiftly down the ladder he, perhaps, climbed laboriously, to end in the oblivion of the bushes whence he emerged so short a time before.

Happily, this season, there were no especially trying instances of this sort. Herman Brosk, the veteran center fielder, realizing that the inevitable had come, spared Kennedy the performance of a distasteful duty by stepping down and out of his own accord. But he was known to have saved his earnings with German thrift, and to be the possessor of a profitable farm in the Middle West. Spider Grant's case was harder, but even he had hopes that a year of care and treatment would put him in shape again. As for Jack Daly, the old third baseman, Kennedy simply benched him, trusting to carry him through the season as a pinch hitter.

Of the new men, Ogan was retained at first, Tap Palsifer at third, while Congreve showed such signs of developing into an exceptional hitter that he was taken on. The fate of Red McLean, Tetlow, and Lane still hung in the balance. The remaining recruits were all shipped to minor leagues, where they would have a year in which to become better fitted for fast company.

On the pitching staff, Temple and Nelson Savage were the only youngsters retained. The former showed indications of becoming a fair, all-round twirler of the sort who might never be spectacular, but could always be depended on. As for Savage, his general work improved constantly; but it was his cleverness with the spitball which attracted general attention and admiration.

Lefty could detect no signs of threatened backsliding in the Westerner's manner. There was a slight restlessness to be noticed at times, and one evening he disappeared from the hotel, returning very late. Aside from these trifling instances he continued to be the same pleasant, likable chap, friendly with all, but particularly devoted to the southpaw, and intensely keen about his progress on the diamond.

The game with the Atlanta Tigers was looked forward to with interest by every man in the squad. The first contest with an outside team always is an event in training camp, but this par-

ticular crowd of Southern professionals had a reputation for unusual ability, and a hot go was predicted.

When they arrived at the hotel just in time for dinner on the day of the game, their appearance seemed to proclaim them real ball players. Bronzed of face, keen and alert of expression, snappy in movement, they bore themselves with an air of quiet assurance which narrowly escaped being cocky.

"Some bunch, that!" commented Dalton, a little later, as he and Lefty stood watching the visitors indulging in gingery practice.

"They should be," rejoined Locke. "I understand they've won every game to date. We ought to take a fall out of them."

"Hope so. I'd feel a lot more sure, though, if you were going to be in the box instead of Nels. He's been showing form lately, but you can't tell how he'd stand being hammered."

"I wouldn't worry about that." The south-paw's tone was confident. "His head's screwed on all right. Unless I miss my guess, he'll make an even better showing against this crowd than he has in practice. He's the sort of a fellow who does his best when pushed to it. Well, there they go. We take the field."

As Savage walked out to the mound Locke could not help contrasting his demeanor with what it had

been on that day when the "vanishing ball" had so startled and bewildered the portsider. He was juggling his glove and smiling over some joke Dalton had made in passing, and seemed utterly devoid of nervousness. He had been cool before, but that was the sneering nonchalance of one who did not care, as different from his manner now as day is different from night. Locke had a sudden conviction that the game would produce no such semihypnotic tricks as the busher had worked off before. Those had been part and parcel of that other detestable personality. The Savage who stood there, a smile lingering on his lips, but with eyes keenly sizing up the batter taking his place at the pan, was incapable of such wretched artifices. He would pitch straight ball, and win or lose on his ability as a legitimate twirler.

Unless two teams have played against each other before, the first inning of a game is likely to prove something of a lottery. Neither pitcher has had a chance of getting a line on the opposing batters. A few fortunate twirlers seem possessed of a sort of sixth sense, almost like intuition, but this is generally no more than an unusually keen observation, coupled with long experience in facing an infinite variety of batters.

Savage had undergone no very lengthy experience. His first delivery was a tentative teaser at which Olds, the big outfielder, failed to

nibble. His second was also wide; then something in the batter's attitude seemed to tell him that a high, close ball might be difficult for him to meet.

It was a wrong guess. Olds rapped the horsehide with unexpected ease, pushing a warm grounder into right field. He sought to draw a hasty throw by romping over first and turning toward second, but Rufe Hyland was wise, and winged a perfect heave to Lewis, who covered the hassock.

Big as he was, and apparently unwieldy, Olds proved astonishingly fast. Taking a deceptively small lead off the sack, he went down, nevertheless, like a flash on the first ball handed up to Moore, the Tiger first baseman.

Evidently expecting such a move, the latter swung at the ball without trying to hit it, his sole intention being to bother the catcher. Dirk Nelson caught the ball in perfect throwing position, and got it off to second with a sharp, short-arm throw.

But the runner covered ground so fast and made such a perfect "fall-away" slide that it was impossible to tell whether he touched the sack first or was tagged successfully. It seemed simultaneous, and he was declared safe.

"Some start," remarked Lefty, who sat on the bench with Pink Dillon. "You wouldn't think,

that big fellow could get over the ground like that, would you?"

"No. I hope it don't rattle Nels."

His fears were short-lived, for Savage showed no trace of annoyance, even. Toeing the slab, he carried the ball to his mouth, covered with both hands. There was an upward and backward motion of his head, and suddenly the captain of the Tigers shouted:

"Look out for the spitter, Irish!"

The admonition was to no purpose. The ball, whizzing from Savage's fingers, took a sharp shoot toward the ground as if actually dodging the bat!

"Strik-ah!" announced the umpire.

Savage repeated the performance, but this time his shoot carried the sphere a shade wide. At least, that was how it evidently appeared to the umpire, an official belonging to the visiting team.

When Savage had handed up two more balls he found himself compelled to put the horsehide over. Behind his hands he pretended to make ready to throw the spitter again, but, instead of moistening the ball, he wiped it as dry as possible on his glove, and delivered a straight smoker for the inside corner.

Moore seemed almost to anticipate what was coming, for to all appearances he thrust out his bat and held it so loosely in his fingers that the ball almost knocked it from his hands. In this

manner he dropped a bunt in front of the plate, and was off toward first.

On the alert, Olds was away like a shot toward third. But Savage had not been caught napping, for the moment the ball left his fingers he was chasing it in. Snatching it up, he whirled to throw, realized that it was too late to catch Olds, and, without a perceptible loss of motion, spun on around, sending the sphere to first. It sped past Moore's shoulder, and Ogan had it with the runner ten feet away.

But the sacrifice had been successful. The Tigers had a man on third, with only one out. Their chance to score seemed good.

CHAPTER XXXI

TWO RUNS BEHIND

“**T**HAT’S the game!” cried McCormick, the visiting captain. “Get into it, Rick. Here’s where we pull in a little old run or two. On your toes, Irish.”

It was an excellent opportunity for a squeeze play, and as Allaire hurried to the plate the infielders closed in, ready to go after the ball the instant it was dumped into the diamond.

Savage, evidently believing that the squeeze would be attempted, handed up a shoot, high and close. Allaire made a foul, and Olds was fully halfway down the line before he could pull himself up and turn back to the sack.

Returning to third, Olds edged off toward the plate, knees bent, every muscle tense.

Savage flashed a glance at him, then got into position to pitch. He did not start to deliver the ball, however, but, suddenly stepping toward third, whipped it to Palsifer.

Three times Savage drove Olds back to the cushion, but when again he pitched, the runner stretched his legs for the plate. Unfortunately

for him, Allaire simply popped a little fly into the pitcher's hands, and Savage, taking his time, threw it to third for a double.

The abrupt termination of the inning brought a grim smile to the lips of Jack Kennedy, who, resting on one knee, with arms doubled under his chest in a characteristic attitude, had been watching the progress of the game. To him the result of the contest was of no importance whatever. It was simply an opportunity to size up his players. Savage had done nothing extraordinary, but he had kept his head and used it, and that satisfied the manager for the present.

Buck Liddell, the slender, wiry, rather handsome pitcher for the Tigers, bore himself in a confident manner, with just a trace of self-consciousness. His wavy blond hair, worn rather long, had a way of trailing down now and then over his forehead, to be tossed back by a jerk of his head, or swept aside with a quick movement of his hand.

"Reckon he's some bear with the Atlanta dames," chuckled Joe Welsh, as he stepped to the plate.

"Regular *matinée* idol," agreed Kid Lewis, swinging a couple of bats.

Liddell nonchalantly sent a couple of sizzlers across to the first baseman while the catcher was adjusting his mask and wind pad. They fairly smoked, denoting that he had speed, at least. A

moment later he toed the slab, swung his arm in a wide sweep, balanced himself on one foot for an instant, and shot over one which Welsh missed by inches.

The next had a hop on it and the batter fouled. Another foul followed and the Big Leaguer recovered himself, a slight frown wrinkling his forehead. When Liddell made ready to pitch again he went through the movements which seemed to indicate great speed. But suddenly, following those movements, he sent in a ball that seemed to drag and hang in the air. Welsh, who a month later would have called it a cinch, was fooled like any youngster, and struck too soon.

"You're out!" said the umpire.

"What's he got, Joe?" asked Lewis in passing.

"Mostly speed and a change of pace. Look out for that."

Lewis made a bid for a hit off the second ball pitched to him. It was a snappy grounder, hugging the sod, but the shortstop made a splendid one-handed stop, whipping the ball to first for a put-out.

Rufe Hyland did better, dropping a fly over the infield, and romping to first with ease. With the first ball pitched to Dalton, Rufe was off down the base line. Thanks to a high throw on the part of the backstop, he made the sack; and his teammates began to root for a run, urging Dalton to

smash out one of the two-baggers which had been his speciality during the previous season.

But Laughing Larry had not regained his batting form of six months before. The best he could do was to lift out a long fly which the opposing left fielder secured without any great expenditure of effort; and the Tigers romped in, pleased by the manner in which they had held down the famous Blue Stockings.

The latter did not seem to be seriously disturbed at the way things were going. There was a lot of josh and banter as they spread out on the diamond. They remembered that they had been in training for little more than two weeks, whereas their opponents, bushers though they were, had been playing the game much longer. They knew that a few weeks hence they would be able easily to beat a team twice as good as this one.

But when, in the second inning, through a series of fielding errors, combined with a strong hitting streak on the part of the Tigers, the latter managed to push two men across the rubber, the pride of the Blue Stockings began to be touched.

"It's up to us to wake up," Dalton remarked, with his infectious grin. "Reckon we've been taking things too easy. Oh, you're all right, kid," he added, catching Savage's eye. "You've got the goods. It's the rest of us dubs that have been loafing on hits and pegging wild. Suppose

we try a dash of pepper.” His gaze shifted around the circle, coming to rest for an instant on the face of Jack Kennedy, who stood within hearing distance. “I guess it won’t hurt anybody, to perk up a mite and show this crowd that we’re not all down with the Charley horse.”

The manager nodded. “Get after their pitcher the moment he lets up,” was his advice. “He won’t last nine innings. He’s putting every blamed thing he’s got on the ball now, and it’s going to wear him out before long.”

CHAPTER XXXII

THE BREAK

WHETHER or not old Jack was right in his prediction—it was probable that he was, since he had few superiors in the subtle art of sizing up a ball player—Buck Liddell certainly showed no immediate signs of slumping. He kept up his extraordinary pace, varying speed, curves, and slow balls in a manner which proved that he possessed exceptional judgment. In the last half of the second only three men faced him; in the third inning, but four. The Blue Stocking batters, piqued by his steadiness, put forth their best efforts to hit him effectively, but in vain.

Savage was equally successful in preventing further scoring on the part of the visitors, though his methods were quite different. He made no attempt, apparently, to try for Liddell's strike-out record, preferring to rely on the support of the men back of him. Each inning saw one or more hits made off him, and the bases were populated most of the time. He was chary of the spitball—that most trying delivery in a pitcher's

repertoire. He used few curves—not nearly so many as his companions knew him to command. It might have been noticed, however, that he varied these with such skill that the effect, though seemingly so infinitely inferior to Liddell's performance, was practically on a par with it. Always at the crucial moment he stiffened, putting forth all the skill he possessed, using spitter or speed or curve, as the occasion demanded.

In the first half of the fifth, with only one out, the Tigers had men on first and second. It was evident that the batter would try to sacrifice, and Locke rather expected Savage to keep the ball high and close in an effort to prevent this. To his surprise the Westerner lobbed over a low one which could not have suited a stickman better if it had been made to order. As in the first inning, however, he followed the pitch through, and was almost on the plate when the batter sent the sphere rolling slowly along the third-base line. Pouncing on it with amazing swiftness, Savage snapped it to third for a force-out. Without an instant's hesitation, Palsifer lined it down to second, beating the runner from first by a foot, and retiring the side in a twinkling.

Kennedy, who stood a few feet away, wheeled toward Lefty. "There's a bit of headwork," he said.

Tap, the infielder, loped in from his posi-

tion, grinning widely over the successful double play.

“Was that turn put up between you and Savage?” the manager asked him.

“Sure!” chuckled Palsifer. “He tipped me off to stick by the base next time a bunt was expected. It worked, didn’t it?”

“It did!” The manager turned to Locke again. “He uses his head. He’s been using it right along. You’ve seen how he’s been sparing himself and depending on his support. That’s what fielders draw their salaries for—to stop balls that are hit at ’em. This boy’s got the right idea. He’s not wearing himself out like that fellow yonder.” He indicated Liddell, strolling across the diamond. “He’s not giving away all he’s got in the first couple of innings. He’s holding back a trick or two for a pinch. That’s the sort of a man I like to handle, and the sort I can make something of.”

Lefty had rarely heard the old manager express himself so warmly over a recruit, and the southpaw was more than pleased by the fact that Savage was making good. After his intervention in the Westerner’s behalf he felt more or less responsible, and it was agreeable to realize that his judgment had not been wrong.

During the last of the fifth Liddell showed signs of growing unsteadiness, which increased when he

was hit by the first two men up. He managed to pull himself together in time to prevent an avalanche of runs, but during the lapse the score was tied, and the entire Blue Stocking contingent felt that it was only a question of another inning or so before the final blow-up.

McCormick, of the Tigers, opened the sixth inning with a single, but the lead he took off first was much less than it would have been earlier in the game. Savage had shown dangerous speed and accuracy in throwing to bases, and the visitors were becoming cautious.

Sam Vogt, the clever little Southern short-stop, was handy at laying down bunts; but Savage kept the first two balls high and close and Vogt found himself in a hole before he knew it.

"That's the stuff, Nels!" cried Dalton. "You've got this chicken cold!"

Savage smiled. Suddenly his whole frame stiffened as if stricken by some strange paralysis. Seconds passed, and still he stood quite motionless, a perfect picture of arrested action, eyes set, the healthy color draining from his face.

As he stared at him in astonishment Lefty felt a sudden premonitory tightening of the throat, and his heart began to beat more rapidly. Then Larry Dalton broke the spell.

"Come alive, old man," he sang out amiably, "and take this victim into camp."

Savage shivered slightly. The next instant, with a little shake of his shoulders, he sent the sphere straight over the center of the pan with only moderate speed.

It was the sort of ball the rawest of recruits might have pitched, and Vogt fell on it with violent delight, smashing out a hot two-bagger. McCormick reached third, and might have scored but for the fast fielding of Max Duoro.

"Well, what do you know about that?" muttered Kennedy, penthouse brows coming together above his big nose.

Lefty made no answer. His eyes were riveted on his friend's face. He was conscious of a sickening sense of apprehension stealing over him. Had it come? Could it be possible that the man out there was fated to undergo that horrible transformation again, and at the very height of his triumph?

CHAPTER XXXIII

SUSPENSE

McKNIGHT, the second baseman, was up, and ready. A successful bunt or a long sacrifice fly would give McCormick a chance to register.

Savage took the signal from Nelson, and nodded. His face was no longer pale, but his jaws were hard, and his lips set in a straight line.

The sphere cut the air, passing high with a slight inswerve, and McKnight's attempt to bunt was a failure.

McCormick was sent diving back to third by Nelson, who whipped the ball to Palsifer. The runner managed to reach the sack, but it was by a desperately narrow margin.

The infielders had crept up into the diamond, and were balancing on their toes. Lefty's heart was pounding; his eyes never left the pitcher's face.

A second time Savage put the ball over high and close, with that same inswerve. Though the batter again did his best to bunt, he only succeeded in making a small foul.

“Got him, Nels—got him!” cried Laughing Larry. “He’s in a hole now.”

McKnight spread his legs, and, taking a fresh grip on the bat, waited for a good one—waited too long. Savage started the ball high. The man at bat evidently fancied it would pass above his shoulders. Too late he saw it take a marvelous drop, shooting down across his chest.

“Three—you’re out!”

Lefty drew a breath of relief, and his tense muscles relaxed. Savage was evidently still there with the goods. Perhaps that inexplicable lapse had been only momentary. Perhaps the thing Locke dreaded had not come, after all.

Wurts, the next man up, took his place at the pan, bat held loosely. Once more Savage kept the ball high and close, and put it over with speed. Like his predecessor, the Tiger backstop bunted a foul.

A wide one followed, which Wurts made no effort to reach. Then came another of those amazing drops, and the batter found himself fooled even as McKnight had been. He failed to strike when the ball cut across his shoulders and breast. An outcurve followed, and was disdained. A moment later, however, he whiffed fruitlessly at a spitter.

“Reckon he’s on an even keel again,” the southpaw murmured under his breath. “Now, if he

can only put the kibosh on this bird he'll be all right."

Few professional pitchers are good batsmen, but there are exceptions, and Liddell had proved himself one of them. His performance with the stick earlier in the game had been admirable, and he advanced to the plate now with determination written all over his slightly supercilious face.

How he missed the first ball was evidently a puzzle to him. He swung at it as if he felt quite certain of meeting it fairly and squarely, and his failure brought a ludicrous look of surprise to his face.

Savage was not faltering now. He wasted no time, nor did he hurry unduly. He put over a curve which fooled Liddell even more than the first one.

"Great work, old man!" cried Dalton. "You can sure put it on that little old pill to-day."

For an instant the rival twirlers faced each other in silence. Liddell's air of superciliousness had vanished; he was biting his lip as he gripped his stick. Savage still wore that expression of grim determination, but his lids were drooping slightly, and for a second Locke was unpleasantly reminded of the fellow's manner two weeks before, when he had tried the vanishing ball. He thrust the recollection from his mind as the recruit pitched.

Liddell's judgment told him that the ball would cut a corner when it broke. He was not mistaken in thinking it would be good, but instead of crossing the outside corner, it took such a sharp shoot that it barely clipped the inside of the rubber.

"Out!" announced the umpire.

Hurling his bat to the ground, the handsome pitcher strode out to the mound in a very unbecoming state of temper.

Lefty moved a little farther over to intercept Savage, who came slowly in, head bent over the glove he was apparently examining.

"You pulled out of that hole fine, old man," Locke said, as soon as the other was within ear-shot.

Savage raised his head for an instant, showing a face which was still rather serious. His eyes were perfectly normal, however, and Locke decided that he must still be troubled over that momentary slump.

"Had to," returned the Westerner briefly. "No business to get into it."

Locke smiled. "What was the matter?"

The recruit's eyes dropped again to the glove, which Lefty saw to be ripped along one side.

"Oh, nothing special," he answered vaguely. "Just carelessness, I reckon."

"We all do it now and then," consoled the portsider. "What's up now?" he asked, as Sav-

age passed the bench and headed for one end of the grand stand.

"Going to get another glove," explained the Westerner over his shoulder. "This is on the blink. I've got a good one stowed away in the dressing room."

Locke nodded, pausing by the bench long enough to see his friend reach the end of the stands and disappear through a door leading to a small, rough sort of dressing room occupying part of the space beneath the seats. It was never used for that purpose by the Blue Stocking crowd, who always changed at the hotel, but it made an admirable storage place for bats, balls, spare gloves, and all the other paraphernalia of the game. The southpaw's attention was swiftly recalled to the field, and there it remained for the better part of ten minutes.

Whether or not Liddell's predicted downfall had been hurried by his experience at the bat, or was simply due at this time, there could be no doubt whatever that it had come. The first man up hit him, and those who followed continued the work gleefully. Before another man could be hustled into the box they had made three runs, and ere the pitcher's successor had worked the kinks out of his arm two more were added. The inning ended with the Blue Stockings five tallies in the lead.

"That's more like it," said Dalton, as the visitors came slowly in from the field. "That's the way it ought to be. Come ahead, fellows; we'll hold 'em down this inning, and see if we can't put the blanket on this new pill slinger. Get a move on, Nels."

Lefty turned in time to see Savage rise slowly from the ground a little to one side of the bench, where he had apparently been sitting since his return from the dressing room. As he passed, on his way to the mound, he not only failed to glance at the southpaw or speak a word, but seemed actually to be averting his head.

The unnaturalness of the proceeding at once struck Locke, keyed up as he was by the busher's inexplicable slump in the last inning. An instant later he drew a quick breath as the unmistakable reek of liquor was borne to his nostrils, and he stared after Savage, his face full of deepest apprehension.

"Whew!" he whistled, "the crazy idiot went off to take a drink. Now the deuce is to pay!"

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE EVIL TRANSITION

SICK at heart, all his recent fears revived, Lefty watched his friend step into the box and prepare to pitch. To the best of his knowledge and belief Savage had not touched liquor for ten days, and his breaking over now seemed to the southpaw like the beginning of the end. Whether it was the cause or effect of that hateful change of personality, Locke did not know; but he always associated drink with the evil side of the busher's character, and he could not now shake off the feeling that the worst was happening.

Savage's first delivery was a swift inshoot that cut a corner of the pan, and was pronounced a strike. He followed it with two coaxers which were disdained. Then came another shoot at which Billy Olds swung in vain, and Lefty was conscious of a growing sense of wonder mingled with that hope which is so hard to kill utterly.

Could it be possible that he had been mistaken? Savage's manner was not what it had been earlier in the game, to be sure. He had lost, in a great

measure, the snap and vim and swiftness of action shown up to now—had become almost irritatingly deliberate. Also, his expression had changed from keen, light-hearted gayety to heavy-lidded somberness. But Locke had never seen the man pitch in a real game before. For all he knew, this might be simply the prelude to a blow-up such as comes to many pitchers at about this stage of a contest. Perhaps he had felt it coming, and resorted to liquor in a desperate effort to brace himself and stave it off.

All of this was unlike the man Locke had come to think so much of, but the southpaw's reluctance to believe the worst made him ready to seize upon any possible explanation. Even when Olds fell upon the next ball handed up and smashed it out for a safety, he did not lose hope. The same thing had happened more than once in each of the previous innings.

Moore, next batsman, hit a slow bouncer to Lewis, who made the mistake of waiting for the ball, and was then forced to throw hastily. That throw was wide, and dragged Ogan off the cushion, permitting Moore to make the base by a single stride.

Savage took the ball from Ogan, and turned to glare angrily at the shortstop. His lips moved, and for a moment it seemed as if a burst of heated denunciation would break forth. In another sec-

ond, however, his teeth came together with a snap, and he stepped back into the box, frowning heavily.

"Don't blame him for being sore," muttered Lefty to himself. "If he's on the verge of a blow-up, that sort of thing certainly gets a fellow's goat. Keeping his mouth shut shows he's got some self-control left."

The portsider was further heartened by the manner in which Savage took the next batter in hand. Allaire did his best to bunt, but the pitcher kept the balls high and close, and two fouls resulted, the second of which came down back of third, giving Palsifer an opportunity to make a circus catch.

Unfortunately these encouraging symptoms were of short duration. Locke could not fail to observe that Savage's work became slower and more labored with each delivery. He started by handing "Brick" Forbes two balls in succession. A single strike followed, then another ball, and the pitcher was in a hole.

There was no similarity now to the debonair coolness with which the Westerner had met the same situation several times before. His face was set and tense, the mouth a single gray line. His lids drooped until they seemed almost closed. His wind-up was dragging, as if each movement was an effort.

Forbes swung savagely as the ball came across the pan, lifting a high fly to center.

"Duoro will grab that," murmured Lefty, his eyes following the white spot sailing across the vivid blue. "He can't miss it."

The young fielder had ample time to get under the ball. It looked like a certainty, and the base runners ducked back to their bags. Unfortunately, by one of those inexplicable slips usually caused by overconfidence, the horsehide struck Duoro's mitt and trickled over the edge to the ground.

Olds stretched himself for third, and a sarcastic chorus arose from the infield, in which Locke could plainly distinguish the voice of Savage, raised in a roar of fury. Olds made his base, getting there ahead of Duoro's throw.

The damage was done.

Still growling inarticulately, his face an angry crimson, Savage sent over a ball which the captain of the Tigers lined out for a two-bagger, scoring Olds and Moore. Sam Vogt fell on the second ball pitched to him, smashing out a line drive between second and short. Laughing Larry pulled off a marvelous mid-air catch, following it with some ground flipflaps, from which he recovered in time to make a throw to the plate that nailed Forbes in an attempt to score after the pill was captured.

Lefty drew a long breath and glanced sidewise at Kennedy, who had scarcely stirred during the entire inning. The manager's face was dark, but, beyond the fact that he was far from pleased at the progress of events, his expression told nothing.

The southpaw's troubled gaze veered swiftly back to the figure of the busher moving slowly toward the bench. In spite of what he had been trying to make himself believe—that this was simply the natural manner of a man struggling against an inevitable breakdown—there was dread in his heart, which increased swiftly as he studied that forbidding face with its lowering brows, drooping lids, and twitching lips.

Savage came straight on, head bent, slapping his glove at intervals against his thigh. He passed Lefty without as much as a glance, heading for a point a little to one side of the bench. The portsider stepped forward. The continued suspense was growing intolerable. He must know, one way or another, how matters stood.

“Brace up, old man, and don't take it so seriously,” he said, with forced lightness. “We all make a bull now and then.”

Like a flash the fellow whirled on him with a movement which suggested the sudden snapping of hardly won self-control.

“Bull!” he snarled, his eyes gleaming through narrow slits. “That's what you call it, is it? Let

me tell you this, Locke: I don't want any of your sympathy. You can save that for those bonehead friends of yours who play ball like a bunch of bushers. What's more, you can keep out of my way from now on. I told you once before that I didn't like your brand, and I meant it. I pick my friends, and you're not one of 'em, nor ever will be. Get me?"

His eyes were wide open now, and from their baleful, evil depths came a gleam of bitter hatred which sent a sickening sense of failure surging over the man on whom they rested for a second before Savage turned and walked away.

Lefty had found out what he wanted to know. His efforts to stave off this moment had been without avail. The evil transition had come again. The very worst had happened.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE LAST STRAW

IT was the shock of having his hopes dashed so utterly and completely that made Locke oblivious for a moment to Savage's insolence. But swiftly the sting of the uncalled-for insult brought the color flaming into his face, and made him leap forward in mingled anger and sorrow.

"Savage! Savage!" he called sharply. But the busher did not heed him.

A touch on his arm cut off further action abruptly. Glancing round, he found Kennedy beside him.

"Get busy and warm up," ordered the manager briefly.

Locke hesitated an instant, his eyes searching the older man's face. The manager was evidently in no mood for conversation. He wheeled and marched over to the coaching line, leaving the pitcher to hunt up a glove, root out Babe Torrey, the change catcher, and proceed to a retired spot.

Their unexpected success in the first half of the inning seemed to put new heart into the Tigers.

Though Liddell's successor was hit several times, fine support prevented those hits from being effective. As the visitors trotted in from the field, Lefty loped over to where Kennedy was standing.

"Want me now?" he asked.

The manager shook his head. "Not just yet. I'm going to give this bird one more chance. Buzz around. You may have to go in any time."

The manager was evidently bitterly disappointed over the behavior of the man he had lauded so highly a little while before, and was probably hoping against hope that he would pull up before the final smash. But the person going out to the mound now held nothing in common with the Savage who had pitched so brilliantly up to the previous innings. They were as unlike as two different beings.

Lefty moved back and continued his warming up with Torrey, pausing at intervals to follow the progress of events on the diamond. He had worked conscientiously while the Blue Stockings were at bat to put his pegging arm into condition, but now his efforts became desultory and intermittent, serving no more than to ward off any possible chill. He kept the ball in motion between himself and Torrey, but it was a mechanical sort of business which showed how absorbed he was in watching Savage.

The change in the latter had become more strik-

ing. He seemed to have thrown aside the efforts he had previously made to conceal his condition, and lapsed into the man Locke had known and detested in the early days of training. He strolled into the box, his lips curling with that old air of insolent condescension, as if he had little or no interest in the proceeding, and was only there in the performance of a not very highly regarded duty.

Locke tried to tell himself that his growing irritation, threatening to become anger he could not bridle, was unjust to the busher's other—and, he believed, normal—self which he had liked so well; but it was all to no purpose. The evil personality of Savage was so strong, so dominant, above all so antagonistic, that the southpaw presently forgot everything save the intense dislike it raised within him.

McKnight, the first batter up, opened the inning with a single off the second ball delivered by the Westerner. Alec Wurts, who followed, seemed to have no difficulty whatever in picking out one that suited him, dumping it into the diamond. He took his medicine at first, while McKnight advanced to second.

"That's the game!" called McCormick from the coaching line. "This guy's all in, boys! We'll have the blanket on him in two shakes."

Earlier in the day Savage had shown remark-

able skill in preventing bunts, or else had used them to his own advantage. The contrast presented by his careless, slipshod work now was too striking to escape general notice, and Locke was not surprised to see Larry Dalton hurry across the diamond and touch Savage on the arm. The portsider was too far away to hear what was said, but he saw the busher roughly shake off Larry's hand and snap out something which brought an angry sparkle to the captain's eyes and a tart rejoinder from his lips.

The reprimand evidently had little effect. Within two minutes Kent, who had replaced Buck Liddell, reached first on a single. McKnight was stopped at third; but, with only one out and the crack hitters coming up, things looked more than encouraging for the visiting team.

"Might as well hand 'em the game, and be done with it!" was the disgusted comment of Babe Torrey, scarcely audible above the racket made by various Tiger coaches. "Why the deuce don't Jack take him out?"

Lefty shrugged his shoulders. He had been keeping an eye on Kennedy, but the manager had not even glanced in his direction.

When Olds squared himself at the rubber, alert and fairly quivering with eagerness, Lefty and the change catcher, with one accord, abandoned their languid tossing of the ball, and faced the

diamond. Both felt that the next few seconds would see something doing.

"He'll knock the coating off the pill unless that fellow takes a brace," muttered Torrey.

Locke had little hope that the brace would come. Savage's expression of careless insolence was unaltered. One might have supposed him a bored spectator, for all the interest he showed. How any sane human being could make such an exhibition was beyond comprehension.

Not only were the first two balls pitched wide of the plate, but the third almost escaped Dirk Nelson's clutches, and made him mutter under his breath as he saw Kent scampering to second, with the sack already safely purloined.

Then came a pause—a curious, tense pause. Watching Savage, Lefty had an odd feeling that the man was aware all at once that he had gone too far. He flashed a single swift glance around the diamond, and moistened his lips. When he faced the batter again, it was with a determined shake of the shoulders and a quick jerk at the visor of his cap that brought it down over his eyes.

Slowly, deliberately, Savage kicked away an imaginary pebble, but without glancing downward. Like a statue, he stood poised, leaning forward slightly. For no single instant did his intent gaze leave the batter's face.

Suddenly Lefty realized what was coming. "He's going to try the vanishing-ball stunt!" he said under his breath.

Would it work this time? The southpaw felt his pulse quicken; his eyes began to smart with the intensity of his stare. Would the man never pitch? Slowly—very slowly—the arm drew back, paused, and at last shot forward, projecting the sphere straight over the heart of the pan.

Before the ball had reached the plate Lefty knew the attempt had failed. The bat came round with every ounce of the big man's muscle behind it. There was that sharp, ringing crack which sends a thrill through every fan, and the horsehide soared out over the infield—on, on, climbing higher and higher.

Duoro and Joe Welsh both whirled and raced toward the fence. The diamond instantly resounded with the shouts of coaches urging on the circling base runners. The Blue Stocking infielders stood dejectedly, hands on hips, following with their eyes the progress of that little dot of gray.

It was falling now. Faster and faster it dropped in a wide arc which would carry it well beyond the laboring fielders. At last it vanished beyond the fence. The voice of Jack Kennedy promptly sounded above the racket made by the jubilating Tigers:

“Get off the field! Yes, I mean *you*—bone-head! Don’t lose any time about it! Locke, get busy!”

As Lefty passed the manager, Kennedy’s angry voice, pitched in a much lower key, followed him:

“Hope to thunder you’re satisfied with your experiment!”

Old Jack rarely lost his temper, nor was he the sort to taunt a man because of mistakes. He did both now, and Lefty could not blame him.

CHAPTER XXXVI

BREAKING A BATTING STREAK

WITH that trained sense of observation which Big League players develop to its highest point of efficiency, Locke had noted the strength and weakness of each Tiger batter, even while his mind was more or less occupied with a study of Nels Savage. Now, to begin with, he forced Moore to foul twice in rapid succession.

With two strikes and no balls declared, the portsider did his best to lead the Tiger batter into reaching. But Moore, evidently having a good eye, was not to be fooled, and three balls were called.

“Take a walk, Irish!” urged McCormick.

Lefty had no intention of walking anybody. He sent over a swift inshoot, which, observation had told him, was as distasteful as any ball to this really exceptional hitter. Moore was ready for it this time, unfortunately, and he cracked out a grounder that Lewis reached with difficulty. It seemed to scorch Lewis’ fingers, and he fumbled. When he recovered the slippery sphere, his throw

was so hurried that it pulled Ogan off the sack, giving Moore "a life."

Instantly the Tiger coaches opened up. But their racket affected the southpaw not a particle. Cool and undisturbed, he continued his work in the box, luring Allaire in to swinging at the first ball over—an elusive curve.

But the hitting germ seemed to be coursing in the veins of the Tigers. With two and three called on him, the batter finally forced Lefty to put the ball over, then lifted it into left field.

It looked as if Joe Welsh had a good chance to get the fly and Moore hesitated on the line, part way down from first, ready to duck back to the bag in time to prevent a double play.

Welsh seemed to stumble a bit just as he was reaching for the sphere. He dropped it.

Moore got away for second like a flash. Welsh made a swift recovery of the ball and lined it unerringly into Dalton's hands, but the runner beat it to the "anchorage." Still Lefty was undisturbed. Not even when Dalton missed stopping a hot liner by what seemed the fraction of an inch, and the bases were filled, did Locke show a sign of worry or irritation. But his jaw hardened a little, and that characteristic expression of stubborn determination his team-mates knew so well came into his face.

He was working with deliberation, and, though

he did not seem to watch the bases, the Tigers swiftly learned that it was extremely hazardous to take much of a lead. It puzzled them not a little, for they could detect no signals between catcher and pitcher. They were up against one of the minor phases of inside ball. The infield's code of signals was well-nigh perfect, and impossible of detection by ordinary outside players.

The first ball to McCormick was a trifle wide. Lefty caught it on the return and seemed about to pitch, but, instead, without the slightest warning, whirled, and threw to second, where Dalton had been edging in. Allaire dived back barely in time, after which he took a smaller lead.

Locke's next pitched ball was a queer little wobbler, lacking speed though delivered with a snap that seemed to promise smoke. The batter saw that it would come over, but his impatience to hit seemed to overbalance his judgment. He struck too soon, popping a little fly which Locke caught without moving from his tracks. Like a flash, he put the ball over to third; but Moore, warned by Allaire's narrow escape, had remained in the vicinity of the cushion, and managed to get back in time.

"That's the way to stop 'em, old man!" called Dalton encouragingly. "Take this rube into camp."

Sam Vogt was no mean hitter. Lefty had sized

him up as one of the most dangerous on the visiting team, for the reason that he had a fine eye, a powerful swing, and few weaknesses.

One of the latter, however, was an evident distaste for a dead slow ball, and that was the sort first handed up by the portsider. Waiting with steady nerves, Vogt saw that it would not cross the plate, and declined to go after it.

He swung at the next one, however—a sharp drop which he simply fouled.

“Give him another like that,” urged McCormick. “He’ll take the peeling off it!”

Lefty smiled good-humoredly, and whipped over a high smoker. It proved to be too high, however, and there was some joyous cackling from the coaches. When Locke followed this up by still another wide one they felt that the famous south-paw had been much overrated, and jubilated loudly.

“Take one, Sam!” advised the captain. “Let him force a run.”

Lefty’s judgment told him that the batter would follow instructions unless he saw that the ball was certain to come over the center of the pan. He consequently laid one carefully over the inside corner, and Vogt let it pass.

“Strike—two!” called the umpire.

There came a momentary pause, hushed and tense. A second later the ball came hissing from

Locke's fingers with a burning speed surpassing anything he had yet known. It took a sharp hop just before it reached the pan, and Vogt's bat slashed empty air.

Lefty had stopped a dangerous batting streak and prevented further scoring.

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE VOODOO CHARM

THE crucial point of the game had been in that first half of the eighth. Before the inning was over the Blue Stockings had discovered the weak points of the substitute pitcher, and hammered out three runs. In the beginning of the ninth Locke proved invincible on the slab, and the game ended with the Big Leaguers in very good humor again.

Lefty glanced curiously about for Savage. The busher was nowhere to be seen, so the southpaw led the crowd at a lope back to the hotel. Turning into Main Street, he saw ahead of him the lanky figure of Kennedy, striding along at a speed plainly evincing some fixed purpose. He had left the field before the finish of the game. That in itself was significant.

"Something doing," murmured Locke.

Quickening his pace, he entered the lobby almost on the manager's heels. The first person his eyes rested on was Savage, lounging against the desk, a half-smoked cigarette dangling from

one corner of his mouth. Kennedy walked straight up to him.

"You can pack up," he said. "There's a train out at three. Don't miss it. If you're hanging around this town to-morrow there'll be something happen that you won't forget. Get me?"

The busher exhaled a cloud of smoke and surveyed Kennedy defiantly from under drooping lids.

"I ought to," he drawled. "You talk loud enough. Supposin' I don't care about leaving? You don't happen to own this hotel, and—"

Half the witnesses thought the manager was going to knock Savage down. The look upon Kennedy's face must have awed the insolent man, for he hesitated an instant before adding slowly:

"Oh, very well. I hadn't any idea of staying. I was just interested in finding out how far you'd go."

He took a step or two toward the stairs; then, with the lithe quickness of a panther, whirled and strode over to Lefty. The latter's muscles tensed, ready for an attack. Savage stopped abruptly, scarcely a foot away, and thrust out his face until his baleful, hate-filled eyes were separated from Locke's only by inches.

"Maybe you think you've pulled off a clever stunt in getting me fired," he said in a voice that

quivered with passion. "But I'm going to get you, and get you good and plenty!"

"Why don't you start something?" Lefty invited. "So far you've managed to duck every time. Just kick in now, and see what happens."

"Too easy!" sneered the busher. "I'll play the game my own way, and I'll put it across on you, bet your sweet life!"

Wneeling, he hurried toward the narrow hallway out of which the stairs led. As he turned the corner, he collided with a negro boy just coming through the door.

"Get outa my way!" he snarled.

A blow of his open hand sent the boy spinning, and Savage passed on, leaving behind a feeling as if a tornado had swept through the lobby.

For a second the negro cowered against the wall. Then, with a frightened whimper, he ran straight for Lefty, catching the southpaw's sweater tightly in both hands.

"Doan let him git me, mistah!" he gasped, his voice shaking with fright. "Doan let him tech me! Ah'll done be turn inter a stone, or suthin'! Ah—Ah knows dat man, mistah! He—he am de dibbil hissself—wif horns!"

A glance only was needed to show that the boy was half crazed with fear. His face had turned a mottled gray, his eyes rolled, his teeth were chattering like castanets. Locke put aside an im-

pulse to get after Savage and chastise him then and there, and gave his attention to calming the negro.

"Don't worry," he said soothingly. "I won't let him touch you." A sudden recollection brought a glint of curiosity into his eyes. "You're new in the hotel, aren't you?" he went on. "How do you come to know anything about that man?"

"Ah—Ah knowed him 'fo' I cum hyer, boss," was the hesitating reply.

By this time Dalton, Ogan, Jack Stillman, and several others had gathered around. Lefty glanced at the reporter, with uplifted eyebrows, and turned swiftly back to the boy.

"Where was that?" he asked. "Tell us about it. You needn't be afraid of him," he added, as the boy glanced fearfully toward the stairs. "He's going away from here in a hurry."

"Dat ain't nuffin'," sighed the boy. "He put de ebil eye on me jes' de same." His eyes grew round and large; his voice sank to an awed whisper: "He's frien's wif ole Mammy Bunce, ober de ribber. She done give him a voodoo chahm. Wif dat an' his ebil eye he do anythin' he want. He make a hoss jump clean across de ribber. Ya-yassir, he done it."

"What!" ejaculated Lefty, in amused surprise. "Why, you young sinner, you—"

"Fo' de Lawd, mistah, thass gospel!" protested the boy earnestly. "Ah done seen him do it. Ah was ridin' Marse Liv'mo's roan to de blacksmif along down ribber—de hoss Mistah Tet'ridge want fo' to buy. Marse Liv'more wouldn't go fo' to sell nohow, an'—"

"Tethridge!" interrupted Locke suddenly. "Who's he?"

"He am de gemman dat's train' hosses for de big race over to Marse Liv'mo's."

Lefty's eyes narrowed the least bit as he remembered that the name of the Englishman who had been Savage's companion that wintry day on the train was Tethridge. He also recalled something Dalton had said about an Englishman who was entering a couple of horses in the race at the county seat two days hence. It began to seem as if there might be points of interest in the boy's fantastic tale.

"All right," he said briefly. "Go ahead."

"Ah was ridin' de roan down ribber," resumed the youth, "when Ah meet up wif dat man. Ah see him at Mammy Bunce once, an' Ah was pow'ful sca't. When he stop an' look at me wif dem debbil eyes, Ah was sca't worse. He say to me: 'Boy, dat hoss am gwine to jump across de ribber; better git off.' But Ah's so sca't Ah jes' couldn't move noways. Den he comes up close, his eyes gettin' bigger an' bigger, lak dey was gwine jump

out'n his haid an' bite me. Woo! He doan' say nothin' mo', but I git outa de saddle an' he jump on. Seems lak Ah couldn't do nothin' but jes' stan' dere an' watch him. He rid straight down to de ribber, an' jab de roan wif his heels, an'—whiff!—over de ribber dey goes, clean to de odder side—one jump!"

A snicker went round the circle, and several of the men lounged off, chuckling at the boy's infinite capacity for lying. Dalton and Stillman remained with Locke, however, to see if there might be any further developments.

"And when you woke up the horse was gone?" Lefty inquired skeptically.

"Yassah. Ah's jes' tellin' you-all dat he jump de ribber."

"Are you sure he jumped, or did you only dream it? How about the tracks? Did they lead down to the water?"

"Ah—Ah didn't stop fo' to look. Ah's so sca't dat man might come back Ah jes' run an' run. Ah didn't dare go back to Marse Liv'mo's wifout no hoss, so I hangs aroun' down to Holt Ferry fo' right long time, an' den comes up hyer, an' Majah Hol'cum done hire me."

"How long ago did this happen?" inquired Lefty.

"Ah doan rightly 'member, boss, but Ah reckon close on three weeks—mebbe fo'."

Locke hesitated an instant, his face thoughtful. Then he shrugged his shoulders and smiled.

"All right, Snowball," he said carelessly. "Chase yourself, and don't worry about this devil of yours. We won't let him swallow you."

With a voluble burst of thanks, the boy scuttled out of the room. Locke turned back to his two companions.

"Some imagination there, eh?" chuckled Dalton.

"Wish I knew what it was founded on," muttered the reporter thoughtfully. "He's evidently met Savage somewhere, and has been thoroughly scared. Do you suppose that blackguard could really have stolen a horse, Lefty? Of course that jumping-the-river stuff is all bunk, but it looks to me as if the kid had been hypnotized by our two-sided friend."

"Oh, I guess he's quite equal to anything," the southpaw returned. "Between three and four weeks ago would place it just before the training season opened, and make it possible for him to be there. Moreover, this Tethridge, who was so anxious to buy the roan, was chumming with Savage the first time I laid eyes on the latter up North. You can take that for what it's worth, Jack."

"Jove!" exclaimed the newspaper man, his eyes brightening. "Looks as if there might be more to that Arabian Nights tale than you'd think at

first. Isn't it up to us to find out from Livermore whether the horse was stolen, and—"

"You can do anything you like, but cut me out." Locke's tone was a bit heated. "I'm sick of the sound of the name of Savage. I'd be thankful if I knew I was never going to hear it again. What's more, with the bunch moving on so soon, I haven't the least intention of getting mixed up in any criminal cases and being held here for weeks, perhaps."

He wheeled and made for the stairs without further delay, leaving Dalton and the reporter alone.

"Right off the bat!" the former grinned. "Say, Jack, what about that voodoo dope the kid was giving us? Anything to it?"

"You've got me," said Stillman. "I happen to know that there is an old black woman across the river with a reputation for holding talkfests with his satanic majesty. Whether Savage kicked into the game or not I can't say." They turned to follow the southpaw. "I reckon Lefty's right about it," he went on regretfully; "but after what he did to-day I'd certainly like to put that Savage proposition where he couldn't play anything but *solitaire* for a while."

CHAPTER XXXVIII

IN THE NIGHT

THE Holcombe House was a low, rambling, typical country hotel such as one sees in many small towns throughout the Southern States. A wide veranda, much frequented on balmy nights and sultry afternoons, stretched across the entire front of the main building, its sloping roof surmounted by a long row of bedroom windows, monotonously alike.

By half past ten the lobby was generally deserted save perhaps for a lone drummer making out his report, or a chance friend of the major chatting with him in the little office behind the desk. At twelve, precisely, the courtly, old-fashioned proprietor followed his invariable custom of shutting up, and retired to his private rooms on the southwest corner of the second floor. Half an hour after midnight the place was tight as a drum.

After a long day of hard work in the open, the Blue Stockings were usually quite ready for bed at ten o'clock, and this night was no exception. Lefty and Larry Dalton were among the first to

go, and by a quarter after the hour they were stretched between the blankets in the room they occupied together, next to Major Holcombe's.

The southpaw slept soundly, but not heavily. Any unusual noise was likely to arouse him. Consequently he was not surprised, a little later, to find himself sitting bolt upright in the darkness, listening in bewilderment to unwonted sounds that seemed to come through one of the open windows. There was an irregular thumping, a muffled crash, the dull pad-pad as of shoeless feet, then a voice raised in anger.

A second later, as his brain cleared, Lefty realized that a struggle of some sort was going on in the next room. This brought him out of bed with a single bound. Gripping the shoulder of the still-slumbering Dalton and giving him a shake, he ran over to the window, thrust up the screen, and slid out on to the veranda roof.

The major's nearest window, not two feet away, was wide open, and as Locke threw one leg over the sill he heard a dull, muffled thud, followed by the heavy crash of a body falling. For a fraction of a second he feared that he had come too late. Then the major's voice, panting and somewhat shrill with excitement, came to him out of the blackness:

"Keep back, yo' ruffian, or I'll put a bullet through you!"

“Don’t shoot, major!” exclaimed Lefty as he dropped into the room. “It’s Locke. Do you need any help?”

There was a brief pause, followed by the click of a switch, and the room leaped into brilliancy, revealing a curious scene. Major Holcombe, tall, lean, and lanker than ever in his abbreviated night-shirt, stood against the wall, one hand gripping an old-fashioned service revolver. His gray hair, left long at the sides to be brushed across the thin spot on top, was mussed and disheveled. He was breathing a little unevenly, and there were hectic spots on his high cheek bones. But his black eyes flashed as he stared at Locke across the body of a man huddled against the foot of the bed.

“I—thank yo’, suh,” he said at last, a touch of the old stateliness in his manner. “Your promptness does yo’ credit, suh, but I seem to have settled fo’ the scoundrel. A clear case of breakin’ and enterin’ combined with murderous assault, suh. The ruffian had a gun, which I was fawtunate enough to knock out of his hand; otherwise I should probably not be heah to tell the tale. I shall call yo’ gentlemen to witness”—by this time Dalton had appeared in the window, and was staring in with bewildered, sleep-muddled eyes—“that I was obliged to strike him down in—”

He broke off abruptly with a whistling gasp, and stared downward. With an inarticulate grunt,

the man on the floor stirred and rolled over, revealing the flushed face of Nelson Savage. There was a slight cut on his forehead, but the reek of liquor in the air gave Locke an impression that the fellow's collapse had been caused as much by drink as by the glancing blow from the major's revolver. With Savage in normal condition, the old Southerner would have stood no chance at all.

"You!" exclaimed Major Holcombe, straightening up. "So!"

He turned to Lefty, his lips set, his lean jaw tightening. "This is a case fo' the sheriff, suh," he said coldly. "The scoundrel evidently wanted revenge fo' havin' been turned out of my hotel. If you will look after him until I can make a hasty toilet, I shall be obliged."

He thrust his antiquated weapon into Locke's hand, and, gathering up an armful of clothes, stalked into a rear room. Lefty stared thoughtfully at the unconscious man for a moment, then glanced at Dalton.

"Revenge," he murmured thoughtfully; "I wonder if that was it—and he mistook the window?"

"Thunder! You mean he was after you?"

"Why not? I told you how he ranted down in the lobby this afternoon, and you can see he's more than half seas over. It would be a simple matter for a man in that condition to mistake the

second window from the corner for the third, especially when they're so close together."

"The scoundrel!" exclaimed Dalton, his face darkening. "I hope— He's coming round."

The southpaw turned to see his enemy struggle to a sitting posture and stare slowly around the room. His eyes were only half open, but as they came to rest on Locke's legs, clad in silk pajamas, they widened, and his gaze traveled swiftly upward to Lefty's face.

"Didn' git yer, but I will yet!" he snarled in half-drunken fury. "If I don't make you—"

"Stop!" ordered Lefty, his patience utterly exhausted. "Another word out of you, and I'll put a gag in your mouth."

The busher promptly let out a stream of unprintable abuse. Locke as promptly stuffed the end of a towel into his mouth, securing it firmly in place with a necktie Larry brought from the other room. Another towel was used to tie the man's hands, and Savage was reduced to a helpless condition.

Looking more like himself, the major presently returned, his mood of cold, determined indignation unchanged. He had been humiliated and outraged, and the person responsible was going to suffer the full penalties of the law. As a precaution, Kennedy was roused, and informed of

what had happened; but he refused to see the recruit, much less interfere in his behalf.

“Let him go to jail, where he belongs,” he said grimly.

Savage was presently carried off by the sheriff, defiant to the last.

When the Blue Stockings departed, late the next afternoon, for Webster, to play an exhibition game at the big county fair, the prisoner was behind bars awaiting trial on charges which could scarcely fail to land him in the penitentiary for a prolonged stay.

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE FACE IN THE CROWD

THE game at Webster was scheduled for the morning in order not to interfere with the horse race at two p. m. The latter was the big event of the fair; but the presence of an organization like the famous Blue Stockings naturally attracted a goodly portion of the big crowd which had come in from miles around.

Kennedy's squad looked upon the occasion as more or less of a lark, and were interested in it mainly because of the opportunity it brought to witness the race. But they found the team from Savannah a snappy bunch, and it was only by really hard work that they pulled out winners by a score of four to one.

Pink Dillon pitched for six innings, and was succeeded by Lefty. The latter had not been in the box five minutes before he noticed a waving handkerchief from one of the lower rows of the grand stand. Looking closer, he was astonished and overjoyed to see Janet Harting and Celia Berkeley smiling down on him.

He had received two letters from Janet since

her departure from Tulane. Both were written in the old, friendly style, which made Locke hope and believe that she had forgotten the disagreement that had spoiled their last evening together; but in neither letter had she hinted at a possibility of their meeting so soon.

"Another surprise, I reckon," murmured the southpaw as he doffed his cap and stared searchingly at the girls' escorts. "Or maybe they came on the spur of the moment. Wonder who she's got with her?"

A second later his heart sank, and even his slightly jealous speculation concerning the identity of the good-looking man at Janet's right was swept from his mind. He would have to face Celia Berkeley! Worse than that, he would be obliged to tell her what had happened to Savage. He fairly squirmed at the thought.

There was a smile on her lips, and her laughing eyes were gazing around the field. She was looking for the man, of course, wondering, probably, why he had not shown himself. How could he tell her the truth?

In his troubled abstraction, Lefty put over a ball which the Savannah batter fell on with violent delight, smashing it out for a two-bagger. The accident brought Locke up sharply, and for the remainder of the game he kept his mind strictly on business.

He had no more idea, as he hurried toward the stands after the ninth, of how to break the unpleasant news than when the necessity for it first burst upon him. Striving to hide his discomfort, he pushed through the crowd to where the girls stood, and greeted them warmly. The escorts proved to be Miss Berkeley's two brothers—good-looking young fellows—who would have appealed instantly to Lefty had his mind not been absorbed with the disagreeable duty before him.

"We only decided to come last night," the Southern girl explained, in answer to Locke's question. "We wanted to, of course, the minute we heard you-all were to be here; but Ted and Billy couldn't tell definitely about getting off till yesterday afternoon. But where's Nels? Didn't he come?"

It was impossible to tell her here in the crowd, so the southpaw hedged.

"No," he answered. "You see, Jack didn't bring the whole squad"—which happened to be quite true—"and Nels was one of those left behind."

"How mean!" pouted the girl. "That manager of yours must be a regular old bear."

To Lefty's relief, she asked no further questions, but at once began a discussion concerning lunch. They had motored over, it seemed, and brought a large hamper with them, the contents

of which Lefty Locke was invited to share. Thankful for the temporary respite, the portsider hustled off to dress, accompanied by Ted Berkeley, while the others sought their machine.

The ordeal he was dreading did not come during the informal meal. At half past one the pitcher found himself beside Janet in a box that must have cost real money to secure at so short a notice, with the disagreeable task still before him.

Directly opposite them was the judges' stand, and Locke had scarcely taken his seat before he became aware of a small-sized disturbance going on in that direction. A tall, erect old gentleman with iron-gray hair and a nose like the beak of a hawk stood against the stand, his hands behind the back of his long frock coat. Beside him were several other less noticeable men—officials, if one could judge from the ribbons on their lapels—while about them was a circle of some two dozen nondescript persons, attracted evidently by the dispute; for the track had not yet been cleared, and people were crossing it in every direction.

The eyes of each member of the little group were fixed intently on the small, wiry little man who stood before the gray-haired judge, rage and indignation mirrored in his keen, narrow face, emphasizing each remark by the slap of a clenched fist against an open palm.

"I tell you, colonel," Lefty heard him assert,

“that mare is a ringer! I know it! I can prove it! She’s got a record, she has! She ran in the race for the Maxworth Cup over the line last September, under the name of Princess. She was a sorrel then, with a white fetlock, and a white crescent on her off flank. She’s a sorrel now underneath the dye this faker soaked on to turn her into a bay, and—”

“One moment, suh!” The colonel lifted an impressive hand. “Yo’ are making serious charges, Mistah Baxby. Steve, run ovah an’ fetch Tethridge. He left heah not two minutes ago.”

One of the men hustled off, and Baxby, finding that the judge turned a deaf ear to his monologue, began to pour out his woes to the crowd of curious onlookers, which increased with every passing minute. He gave the date of the race, the fact that Tethridge had been the owner of the winning horse, and various other details in such a positive manner that Locke, becoming convinced that he was speaking the truth, waited for the Englishman’s appearance, with a smile of grim anticipation.

After considerable delay, Lefty discerned the attendant returning. Beside him was the lean, lank, rather awkward figure of a man with a slouching gait and a thin, hard, weather-beaten face. The pitcher had no difficulty in recog-

nizing this individual as the same Tethridge whose slurs on professional baseball had once roused his ire.

As the Englishman came closer, a certain veiled anxiety almost hidden beneath an overassured manner, made Locke wonder if the attendant, inadvertently or otherwise, had not put the fellow on guard.

Pushing through the rapidly increasing crowd of people, Tethridge paused before the judge. "Well, old chap," he drawled, "what might be the trouble?"

The colonel cleared his throat and bent a searching gaze on the man, which was returned without the tremor of an eyelash.

"A serious charge has just been made against yo', suh," explained the official. "Mistah Baxby heah asserts that the mare yo' have entered under the name of Alice Gray is a—ah—ringer, suh. He claims that she won the Maxworth Cup under the name of Princess."

"He's a bally liar!" retorted Tethridge, drawing himself up. "Princess is a sorrel with white mawkings. Blimy—I ought to know! I only sold the blooming mare a fortnight since."

"Who'd you sell her to?" shrilled Baxby. "Produce the owner—I dare you! Produce the bill of sale! You can't do it! Because why? She's over there in the stable this minute, daubed

up with dye! A bit of acid will show up the fake, you crook!"

By this time the space about the judges' stand was packed with people, jostling, shoving, and surging back and forth as they tried to get a place in the inner circle to see what was going on. Some one raised a cry of "ringer," and it spread like wildfire, echoing in a chorus about the track. Others came running; the people in the boxes and seats stood up to see and hear better. The whole affair reminded Lefty suddenly of a brimming powder keg waiting for the spark. He was just congratulating himself that the girls were not down there in that seething mob when all at once a new actor entered upon the scene.

He was a burly fellow of thirty-five or so, and he came tearing up the track, dragging by the arm a wizen colored boy, roughly dressed, and evidently frightened half out of his wits. Straight at the crowd the man launched himself, boring a hole with his big shoulders, heedless of angry protestations from those he was shoving aside. At last he burst into the inner, much diminished space—the boy popping after him like a seed squeezed from an orange—and glared around.

"There you are!" he roared, in a voice which rose even above the din. "You dog!" He shook his fist under the Englishman's nose, and Teth-

ridge shrank back to the edge of the narrow circle. "I'm going to beat up that face of yours so your own mother won't know you!" He whirled toward the judge. "Kunnel, my horse is gone lame!"

An uneasy quiver eddied through the crowd. Voices took up the news, adding the name of the horse which had so unexpectedly failed at the last moment. Freckles couldn't run—he was out of the race. Freckles was evidently a favorite, for instantly men by the dozen flung themselves out of the mob and tore over to the betting shed.

The noise increased. Lefty, bending over the edge of the box, could see the colonel's lips move, but heard no sound. Tethridge, his ruddy color gone, shrank behind the officials, passing a limp hand across a shining forehead. Gesticulating wildly, the big, black-haired man continued to shout out his story. Though Locke missed a word here and there, he heard enough, thanks to that bull-like voice, to understand what it was all about.

Tethridge had evidently tried to bribe the stableboy to prevent his master's horse—the favorite above all other entries—from running. Not daring to take the risk, the boy refused; but threats or bribes, or both, sealed his lips. Not an hour before, Tethridge had been in the stable with a friend, who had diverted the attention of

the trainer long enough for the Englishman to slip into the favorite's stall and out again. When the horse was led out he limped badly, and examination revealed a cut muscle which would take months to heal, if, indeed, a cure could ever be accomplished. No one had actually seen it done, but that was unnecessary.

The recital proved to be that spark which Lefty had been expecting. With a roar, the crowd surged forward.

A gasp arose from the stands. Women screamed and turned their backs. For a second Locke expected to see the man torn to pieces before his eyes. But at this juncture Colonel Arlington gave an exhibition of strategic maneuvering which proved his early training. With a single sweep of his arm, he flung Tethridge against the foot of the narrow steps leading up into the judges' stand. In another second he whipped out a large revolver and held the crowd at bay until the terror-stricken man and the various officials had climbed into the stand. Once safely up there, with the colonel and his revolver at the top of the steps, the mob might surge and eddy and roar around the base of the structure without doing a particle of harm.

It did not even come to that. Almost immediately, now that the cause of their excitement had been spirited out of reach, the units of the mob

began to lapse into individuals, and realize how foolish they had been. In rapidly increasing numbers they slipped away, some spurred by the necessity of rearranging their bets, until at last the crowd had shrunk to a size easily handled by officials and policemen hurrying up.

From his seat in the box, Lefty smiled grimly as he watched the white and terrified Tethridge, cowering behind the railing of the stand.

"And you're the man who called professional baseball crooked!" he murmured to himself. "I wonder—"

He stopped abruptly, gripping the arms of his chair spasmodically. Unaccountably his gaze had shifted to the fair-sized crowd still thronging about the foot of the judges' stand. He found himself staring down into the upturned face of Nelson Savage!

CHAPTER XL

BEWILDERING FACTS

IT was but a momentary glimpse, for the crowd, seized with a panic at the approach of a number of policemen, fled in a body, and the busher was whirled out of sight in an instant. But it was enough. Locke knew that face too well to be mistaken. It was Savage—the man he had left sixty miles away behind iron bars, with no chance of a trial within the week at least.

The thing was incredible. It was on a par with that fantastic story of the jumping horse, and for a moment Locke felt his brain reeling. He pulled himself together to answer a question of Janet, then set about reasoning it out more calmly.

There must be some natural explanation, of course. The fellow was here in Webster. That much was beyond any doubt. There were only two possible ways of his getting out of jail—either he had broken out, or in some inexplicable manner he had been released. The southpaw found it difficult to understand how either of these things could have happened. After a most un-

easy ten minutes, he excused himself, and left the box to seek a long-distance telephone.

He had some difficulty in getting the Tulane jail, but when he finally did so the connection was so good that he recognized at once the voice of Joe Warren, the assistant keeper, an ardent fan who had spent most of his off hours at the ball park.

“Joe, this is Locke,” Lefty said quickly. “I wanted to ask you about Savage. Is he—still there?”

“Here!” The man’s voice vibrated over the wire with sudden shrillness. “I should say nit! The old man chased him as far as the station, and then lost him. Reckon he must have jumped the fast freight that went through a couple of minutes before.”

Locke’s eyes narrowed. The explanation was very simple, after all.

“Broke out, did he?”

“You bet! Lord knows how he done it, but he cut his way through the roof of the calaboose. Couldn’t even wait till dark, an’ of course he was seen. It ain’t twenty minutes since old Mose Peters piped him climbing through the hole he made, an’—”

“*What?*”

“I say, it ain’t more’n twenty minutes ago that he broke out. Mose Peters lives in that—”

"But that's impossible!" protested Lefty dazedly. "Stop kidding, Joe, and tell me the story straight."

"I ain't kidding!" Warren's voice took on a slightly injured tone. "It might be twenty-five minutes by now, but not a second more. Peters seen him through his back winder, an' hustled over as fast as his rheumatics would let him. Bob took it on the run without even waitin' for his hat. Got a glimpse of the feller duckin' out of Main Street toward the station, but that was the last he seen of him. By hard runnin', he jest about had time to hook on to the freight above the station, an' that's what we reckon he done. I ain't seen Bob since. He 'phoned from the station for me to send down his hat an' gun, an' that's when I heard about it. I hadn't no more'n hung up before you rung."

Lefty drew a long breath, and passed one hand dazedly across his forehead. Visions of high-power motor cars, of aëroplanes even, flitted through his mind; but the speediest of them could not make three miles a minute. By changing from the freight to the down train, which came along within the half hour, Savage could reach Webster around half past four at the earliest. But he was here now—somewhere out in that vast crowd swarming around the track. At least, the pitcher had been positive of that until this mo-

ment; now his mind began to waver. He might have been mistaken by a chance resemblance—it was within the bounds of possibility. Through the thin partition before him the muffled shuffling of many feet and the rasping sound of many voices came to him from the betting shed. Then he realized that Warren was speaking:

“Hello! Hello! Are you on yet, Mr. Locke? Say, how the mischief do you happen to know anything about the escape? Bob ain’t ’phoned you, has he?”

“N-o.” The pitcher’s face had suddenly become curiously altered. The lips were firm, the muscles of the jaw had hardened. “No, Joe,” he repeated more briskly, “Bob didn’t ’phone. I—thought I saw Savage in the crowd on the track just now, but of course that’s—impossible. Yes, sure! I guess you’ll pinch him all right. We’ll be back by to-morrow noon, I reckon. Sure, we licked ’em—four to one. I’ve got to get back for the race. Good-by.”

Returning to the box, Lefty found that order had at last been reëstablished, and that the first race was about to start. After all the preliminary excitement, the actual events seemed rather tame. The party sat through two of the races, then Miss Berkeley suggested that they drive back to the hotel to have an early dinner before the rush.

The southpaw was still unusually quiet, and

more than once Janet jokingly commented on his preoccupation. He laughed it off, but when they reached the hotel and the girls went to their rooms to dress for dinner, the thoughtful pucker flashed instantly back into his forehead.

"Well, suppose we improve the shining hour with a nip or two of bourbon," suggested Ted Berkeley. "I've got some good stuff in my bag. You'll join us, won't you, Locke?"

Lefty smilingly shook his head. "I can't. We have to keep pretty strict training, you know. I'll come along, though, and watch you punish it."

Berkeley, laughing, acquiesced, and led the way toward the elevators. Already the lobby was filled with a heterogeneous assemblage and as they pushed their way through Locke's roving eyes suddenly lit up at the sight of a figure moving along a cross corridor toward the side entrance.

With a hurried apology and a promise to come up later, he fairly flung himself in the direction the fellow had taken. Halfway down the corridor the young man glanced back, and, instead of stopping, jerked his hat over his eyes and sped on almost at a run. A moment later he became mixed up with an entering crowd. Before he could extricate himself, Lefty reached him and caught his shoulder.

“Hold up a minute, Savage!” he said quietly.
“I want to talk to you.”

With no reply save a defiant movement of his head, the bushier turned and faced him. For a tense moment their glances clashed. Then Lefty broke the awkward pause.

“I know all about it,” he said, in that same quiet, restrained tone. “Suppose we go up to my room and talk it over?”

Savage hesitated momentarily. Then, with a slight shrug of his shoulders, he followed Lefty back through the hallway. A few seconds later the metal gate of the elevator shaft clanged shut behind them.

CHAPTER XLI

REVELATIONS

THERE was a constant passing and repassing of people through the lobby, but not until after five did the advance guard of the Blue Stockings, consisting of Kennedy, Dalton, Gene Temple, and Ogan, appear. They came by the main entrance, laughing and joking, at the precise moment that a broad-shouldered young man, a soft hat pulled down over his eyes, turned from the register and put a question to the clerk.

“Tethridge?” the latter repeated briskly, turning for an instant to inspect the keyboard. “Why, he hasn’t come—”

He stopped abruptly, with a sniff of surprise, for the young man, without a word of explanation, had whirled about, and was making swiftly for the side corridor. A second later the keen eyes of the Blue Stockings’ manager sighted him; there was a gasp of astonishment, checked in its very birth. Then a shout:

“Savage! Grab him, Temple—don’t let him get away!”

For a fraction of a second, Temple, who was

nearer the hurrying man than any of the others, seemed to hesitate. But another roar from Kennedy, accompanied by a forward rush, spurred him on, and, plunging through a throng of bewildered loungers, he grabbed the Westerner by one arm.

With a snarl like that of a trapped animal, Savage whirled on him. "Let go, you cheap sport!" he cried. "If you don't, I'll put the whole crowd wise to your crookedness—"

He did not finish, for at that moment Kennedy gripped the other arm, and, with characteristic presence of mind, shoved him through the door of an adjoining writing room, whence he was followed by the other members of his squad. Then the door slammed in the face of the crowd of curious spectators.

There was another door leading to a small reception room, but this Ogan promptly closed, taking his position in front of it. Kennedy released his hold on the busher, who stepped back against a table, his chin high, his eyes insolently returning the manager's steady, contemptuous stare.

"So you broke out?" the latter commented scornfully. "Nice one you are to talk about crookedness! Why, that's your middle name!"

Savage's eyes gleamed. "At least I never forged my father's name, like that man!" he retorted, with a vicious side glance at Temple's

flushed face. "Nor passed myself off for an amateur after I'd played professional ball all summer. Oh, you can't deny it! I know! Your old man didn't prosecute, but it's the truth, all the same. You didn't think to run up against me, I s'pose, after pitching two seasons as Fred Moore out on the coast, an' then trotting back East to pretend you were a sweet young innocent that didn't even know fellows got money for playing ball."

Temple's face was flaming now, and his eyes were filled with a mixture of bitter shame and indignation.

"That's nothing to what I've got on you!" he retorted. "It's past and gone now." His eyes swept pleadingly from one face to another. "I had to earn money to get through, and pitching was the only trade I knew. The rules of professional athletics are unjust, anyhow. Fellows do other things for money to help them along in college—waiting, dishwashing, tutoring, coaching—why shouldn't they play ball? The check was a heap worse, but it was that or starve. Since my father forgave me, I don't see it's anybody else's business."

He caught his breath, and his eyes returned to Savage's sneering face.

"You're a corker to bring up things like this!" he went on bitterly. "I was in the grandstand

the day you pitched against the Atlanta Tigers. Oh, I know you didn't see me! I was spread out flat, taking things easy. But I saw *you*—through a crack in the floor. It was a nice, wide crack, too, that gave me a fine view of the dressing room underneath. I saw everything that went on there. I know the game you've been playing, and when I've told Kennedy he'll—"

"Great—cats!" The exclamation came in a gasping gurgle from the lips of Al Ogan. "Am I seeing things?"

The door had opened and closed. Two men stood with their backs against it. One was Lefty Locke. The other so resembled in every detail—save expression alone—the sneering bushier leaning against the table that the result was petrifying.

A tense silence fell upon the room as the dazed occupants stared with widening eyes and sagging jaws at this apparent miracle. It was the face of the manager which changed first. His gaze had been shifting continually from Savage to the newcomer, and back again. Presently the dark, heavy brows lowered in a scowl.

"So there's two of you!" he snapped.

A bitter smile flitted across Locke's lips. "A pretty dual personality, Jack," he said quietly. "This has certainly been one on me, all right."

The newcomer took a step forward, his face serious.

"I know you'll be furious, Kennedy," he said slowly. "You certainly have a right to be, but I—"

"Hold on, there!" The manager's voice was harsh and angry. "You say you know all about this game," he went on, glaring at Temple. "Suppose you spin out the rest of that story."

Temple flushed and dropped his eyes. Apparently he would have much preferred remaining in the background.

"There—isn't—much more," he stammered. "I'd dozed off, and when I came to I heard some one moving around down below. It was Savage, and I was some surprised that he wasn't out on the field. Once he went outside for a minute or two, and a little while afterward the other one came in."

"Other one!" ejaculated Kennedy. "You knew there were two, then?"

Temple nodded. "I knew Neil here"—he glanced at the scowling fellow by the table—"had a brother, Nelson, who was a lot better pitcher, and when I found him passing under Nelson's name I guessed there was something queer about it."

"But you kept your mouth shut because of what he knew about you," growled the manager. "Go on."

"I hadn't any idea they were so much alike.

When I saw them together in the dressing room under the stand I was stunned for a minute. I gathered from their talk that they had planned to make a shift that night, but Neil was half full, and insisted on going out then to finish the game. Said if Nels didn't agree he'd go out anyhow. So he got his way. They changed clothes, and Nels went out through the gate in the fence, while the other walked out on the field. That's all, I think."

"All!" Kennedy repeated harshly. "I should hope so!" He turned to Nelson Savage with a heavy scowl. "You're the one I hired, ain't you?" he snapped. "I thought so. You deliberately turned my offer over to this miserable brother of yours, didn't you? Well, what did you do it for? You must have known what he was. What was the game?"

Nelson Savage winced a little, clenching his hands tightly behind his back.

"I did it because I wanted him to have one more chance," he explained, in a low tone. "He'd been going to the bad for a long time, but he can pitch when he's right. I hoped a chance like that, and being down here in training where he couldn't drink, would make him pull up. I even gave up baseball myself, much as I hated to, and accepted an offer to go on the road for a sporting-goods house."

He hesitated an instant, and caught his lip between his teeth. "It wasn't any use. When I came down through the State, I stopped off to—see a friend, and also to learn how he was making out. I discovered that Neil had got in with a shark named Tethridge, who was training some race horses over at Livermore's place, across from Tulane. He'd evidently been supplying my brother with liquor, for when I slipped over there I found Neil so intoxicated he could hardly move. He was as bad next morning, and there was nothing to do but take his place until he could sober up. He seemed perfectly content to lie around doing nothing, but finally I simply had to cut out and attend to work or lose my job. So I looked him up, and told him he'd have to come back. I'd planned to make the shift after the game, but—well, you've heard about that. I know what a poor trick it was to play on you, Kennedy, but I was trying to save my brother. If I can ever make it up to you in any way at all, I'll be mighty glad."

During the recital, to which the others listened with absorbed interest, Neil Savage had preserved his attitude of sneering composure, unmoved. Now he straightened languidly, and yawned.

"Now that the Sunday school sentiments have all been expressed," he drawled insolently, "I

don't suppose there's any particular use of my hanging around."

For a second Kennedy did not answer. He was looking at the other brother, and the expression of appeal in Nelson's eyes would have moved a much harder-hearted person than old Jack.

"All right; you can beat it," he said shortly. "I might suggest that in the future Georgia would be a good State for you to avoid."

"Thanks for the advice," was the nonchalant reply. "I had the same notion myself."

Without further comment, glancing neither to right nor left, he moved toward the door. Lefty stood aside to let him pass, his look eloquently expressing the indignation which was consuming him. Nelson Savage, his eyes fixed rather wistfully on his brother, took an impulsive step forward as Neil passed, and then drew back, his face white. The door opened and closed with a slam which had in it a sense of finality as absolute as the word at the end of a tale. The pause that followed was broken by Kennedy.

"You're a fool, young man," he said, "to monkey with a brother like that; but I reckon you've had your lesson. You can pitch, and I believe you can make good in professional baseball. Mebbe, after this, you won't care to tie up with me, but perhaps I can get you a try-out with Ben Frazer, manager of the Wolves. He's got a catcher, Brick

King, that he's been trying to trade for a twirler, but I don't want any of his lemons. Still," he added, "everything considered, I ought to have first shot at you. If you've got a full line of the goods I've seen a few samples of, I might give you a chance to put your John Hancock to a Blue Stocking contract. Would you?"

Savage's face lightened. "Would I?" he cried. "Just give me that chance!"

The time came when old Jack regretted that he had not entered into some sort of negotiations with Frazer which would have secured the young catcher, Brick King, for the Blue Stockings. For it was the wonderful work of King, who had been dubbed "The Lemon," that lifted the Wolves out of the second division and made them championship contenders up to the very finish of the season. The story of this most sensational and exciting battle for the pennant is told in "Brick King, Backstop," which is the title of the fifth volume of The Big League Series.

With the departure of Neil Savage, happening to glance toward the door of the small reception room, Lefty was surprised to see it ajar, and, standing in the opening, the figures of Janet and Celia.

How long they had been there he did not know, but without delay he walked swiftly over. Miss Berkeley's face was serious; the gray eyes, fixed

so intently on Savage, held a glint of tears in them. She did not speak or even turn her head when the southpaw, his expression somewhat stern and accusing, drew Janet back into the other room.

"You knew all the time," Lefty said briefly, his brows drawn down in a frown.

She put one hand lightly on his arm, and raised her anxious, questioning eyes. "Celia told me about it," she explained hastily, "but made me promise never to breathe a single word—even to you. Surely you won't blame me for keeping that promise?"

For a second the frown struggled for existence before it was swept away by the light which illumined Lefty's whole face.

"Perhaps I'll forgive you—if—"

His hand had found hers. He bent nearer, looking into the depths of those wonderful violet eyes. His voice sank to a murmur, so low that no third person could possibly have heard and understood.

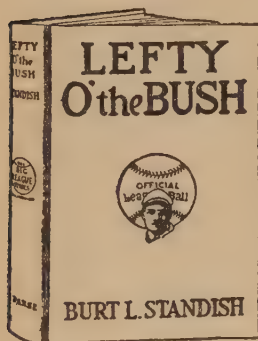
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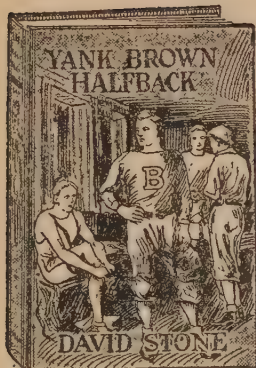
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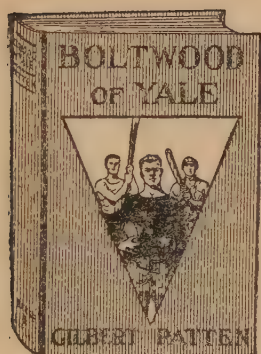
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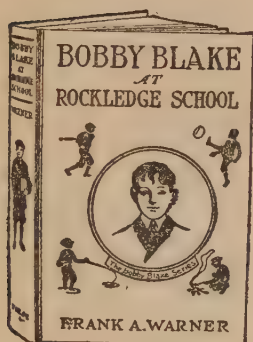
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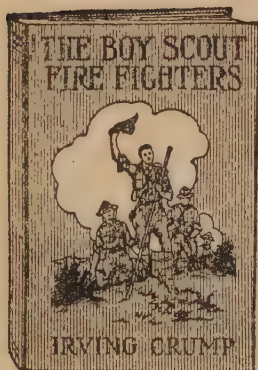
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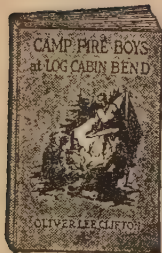
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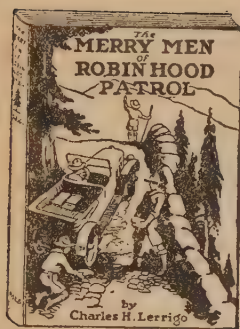
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